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# BUSHFALLING

**How young Cameroonians dare to migrate**

**ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT**

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus  
prof. dr. D. C. van den Boom  
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties  
ingestelde commissie,  
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel  
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door

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geboren te Kiel, Duitsland

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# Table of Contents

<b>List of illustrations</b> .....	vi
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	vii
<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>Bushfalling, trafficking and the governance of migration</b> .....	1
Ambitions of mobility and conditions of impossibility .....	4
Migratory risks and information .....	6
<i>The imminence of departure: secrecy, jealousy and bad luck</i> .....	7
<i>Delphine: scholarships, cyber massas and doki men</i> .....	8
<i>Delphine: luck and trust in information</i> .....	9
The geographical and historical emergence of bushfalling .....	12
<i>The black bush and the worldly bush</i> .....	12
<i>Precedents of labour migration</i> .....	13
<i>From migrants as been to, to migrants as bushfallers</i> .....	15
Human trafficking and the governance of migration .....	17
<i>From human trafficking to conditions of departure</i> .....	18
<i>From vulnerable migrant women to attempts at controlling migration trajectories</i> .....	20
<i>From illegal migration to the regulatory dynamics of emigration</i> .....	22
Plural regulatory authorities: state, market and family .....	23
Fieldwork in Cameroon: marriage, money and papers .....	26
<i>Fieldwork site</i> .....	27
<i>Case studies</i> .....	28
<i>Methodology</i> .....	30
Departure .....	32
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>A line for 1.5 million cfa: Overcoming closure through migration brokers</b> .....	34
<i>Warnings against dokimen</i> .....	35
<i>Relations between migration brokers and aspiring migrants</i> .....	36
Conceptualising migration brokers .....	38
<i>Migration brokers in Anglophone Cameroon</i> .....	38
<i>Migration brokers and the vulnerabilities of migrants</i> .....	40
<i>From traffickers and smugglers to dokimen, feymen and big men</i> .....	41
A trip to the airport with Mr. Walter: brokerage relations and horizons of expectations .....	43
Pamella: risking money at times of crisis .....	48
<i>Mr. James and Pamella's parents: surviving the younger ones</i> .....	49
<i>Relations between Mr. James and Pamella: authority, connections and education</i> .....	51
<i>Involuntary return: experiencing failure and seeing success</i> .....	56
Victoria's brother goes to China: trading transformative potentials .....	61
Conclusion .....	68
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>The rise and fall of migration brokers: The limits of credibility beyond the law</b> .....	71
<i>Migration brokerage and state authority: limits of credibility beyond the law</i> .....	74
To follow doki: the power of brokers and the production of papers .....	76
<i>First encounters with Mr. Walter and Mr. James: the power of a connection</i> .....	76
<i>Range of mediators for migration: dokimen, feymen and big men</i> .....	79
<i>Beyond illegality: powerful brokers and papers that work</i> .....	83

The emergence of Mr. James as a migration broker: moral economies of connectivity and information as currency.....	85
<i>Perceptions of clients</i> .....	85
<i>The biographical trajectory of Mr. James and the emergence of his office</i> .....	88
Closure: the limits of a director and his department.....	91
<i>Limits of trust between migration brokers, mediators and employees: the closing down of INACOD</i> .....	92
<i>Credibility and the realm of the official</i> .....	96
'They can send him back?' Exploring the limits of the law.....	99
<i>Mr. Walter and his employees</i> .....	100
<i>Mr. Walter's personal trajectory</i> .....	102
Conclusion.....	104
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>Legality, luck and technologies of mediation: What does it take to get a visa?</b> .....	107
<i>Visas, legality and technologies of mediation</i> .....	110
Travel permits, luck and mediation.....	111
<i>Delphine's passport: bridging the inside and the outside of institutional walls</i> .....	112
<i>Delphine's visa and the remoteness of regulatory requirements</i> .....	115
<i>Delphine's departure: visas, mangos and foolishness</i> .....	117
Legal mediation and mediated law: behind the window of the US consulate service.....	120
<i>At McDonald's: chance in the production chain</i> .....	121
<i>Rule by decision</i> .....	123
<i>Mediated law, suspicion and the production of boundaries</i> .....	126
Travel permits, money and state regulation.....	132
<i>Visas as tickets</i> .....	132
<i>Price and fee</i> .....	133
<i>Visas as revenue</i> .....	135
Conclusion.....	136
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Security@marriage.fr: Marriage migration and the production of fraud and selfishness</b> .....	139
Border spectacles of marriage migration.....	142
<i>Securitisation, security and marriage migration</i> .....	142
<i>Unravelling security agendas of state and family: visas and bridewealth payments</i> .....	143
<i>Money, sex and Internet-mediated marriages in Cameroon</i> .....	145
State and Security.....	148
<i>French consulate: securing paper, money and mobility</i> .....	148
<i>French consulate: securing marriage, love and citizens</i> .....	153
<i>The bureaucratic production of fraud and selfishness at the U.S. consulate</i> .....	158
Family and security.....	159
Cameroonian women and security.....	165
<i>Nuretta: securing sex and marriage</i> .....	166
<i>Nuretta: securing bridewealth and status</i> .....	169
Conclusion.....	171
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Unlucky, but worldly: The moral economy of deportation in Cameroon</b> .....	174
Moral economy of deportation.....	176
Buea: bad luck and secrecy.....	178
<i>A surprise guest at a njangi meeting: the public secret of deportation</i> .....	178
<i>Remembering and narrating deportation: sex, marriage certificates and laissez passers</i> .....	181

<i>Trying to leave again: the success and failure of migration</i> .....	184
<b>Douala: levels of worldliness</b> .....	186
<i>'Maintaining one's level' after deportation</i> .....	186
<i>The black bush and the status of an ajebotar</i> .....	188
<i>Illegality, status and family connections</i> .....	189
<b>Babisi: family expectations and marriage</b> .....	191
<i>From bush to bush</i> .....	191
<i>A bushfaller marriage and its repercussions</i> .....	192
<i>Saying goodbye to your parents in the black bush</i> .....	194
<b>Abuja: sexuality and status</b> .....	195
<i>Going back to where you came from</i> .....	195
<i>Trafficking numbers: 0034, 00237, 00234 and 0044</i> .....	198
<i>Deportability and sex</i> .....	200
<b>Bad luck, bad behaviour and laziness</b> .....	202
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	205
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>Bush at all cost: Migration trajectories at their point of departure</b> .....	208
Political anthropology of migration .....	209
<i>High aspirations and low capabilities</i> .....	210
<i>Ethnography of the regulation of emigration</i> .....	211
<i>The construction of the state's monopoly of the legitimate means of movement</i> .....	212
<b>From human trafficking to the sexual economy of mobility</b> .....	213
<i>Prostitution and sexuality</i> .....	214
<i>Marriage and courtship</i> .....	215
<i>Migration brokers and migrant vulnerabilities</i> .....	216
<b>From bushfalling at all cost to the moral economy of departure</b> .....	218
<i>The costs and gains of migration</i> .....	218
<i>From uninformed choices to the economy of migratory knowledge</i> .....	220
<i>Migration failures and the place of the law</i> .....	222
<b>The governance of migration and the distribution of social risks</b> .....	224
<b>Annexes</b> .....	226
Graph 1: If you were to receive 2,5 million cfa what would you do with the money? .....	226
Graph 2: Wanting to and trying to fall bush .....	226
Table 1: Trying to fall bush .....	227
Annexe 1: Methodology of quantitative Survey .....	227
Annexe 2: Questionnaire of the quantitative survey .....	228
Annexe 3: Lexicon and abbreviations .....	231
Annexe 4: Transcription of the song 'Njumboss@yahoo.fr' by Erico .....	235
Annexe 5: Advertisement posters of migration brokers .....	236
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	237
<b>Summary</b> .....	254
<b>Samenvatting</b> .....	260

## List of illustrations

- Photo 1: Advertisement for a photography shop in Buea
- Photo 2: Advertisement for passport photos in Yaoundé
- Photo 3: Bar in Buea: Bush Faller's Spot
- Photo 4: Film Poster: Paris à tout prix
- Photo 5: Bar in Buea: 'Restaurant Schengen Place'
- Photo 6: Advertisement for a migration broker
- Photo 7: INACOD: flows of information
- Photo 8: INACOD: international connections
- Photo 9: Bar near Douala: 'Ambassade'
- Photo 10: Bar in Yaoundé: 'Ambassade'
- Photo 11: Bar in Bamenda: 'Wisdom Embassy Annex'
- Photo 12: Bar in Bamenda: 'Ambassador'

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## INTRODUCTION

### Bushfalling, trafficking and the governance of migration



1. Advertisement material of a photography shop in Buea

The cover page of this book shows a woman working at ‘Snack bar le visa’. The bar owner told me that the name was good advertisement because it drew attention and attracted new clientele. Many bars and restaurants in both Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon speak of the dream of international mobility: Ambassador, Ambassade, Embassy Wisdom Annexe, and Restaurant Schengen Place. Event sachets of whiskey are sold under the name of visa. For only 250 CFA, everyone can have a taste of a whiskey sachet of visa.

These choices for names for bars and whiskey sachets reveal the attractiveness of migration in Cameroon, but also evoke how unattainable this mobility has become for many Cameroonians. I noticed, for example, how a small store in the capital of Cameroon advertised passport photos with a signboard that read: ‘photo visa – permis minute’ (see photo 2). The storeowner was playing to the desire of young Cameroonians to obtain a travel permit within a minute. These advertisement strategies conjure up questions about the ways in which Cameroonians envisage emigration trajectories.



2. Advertisement for passport photos in Yaoundé

Throughout fieldwork, I noticed a series of playful jokes about access paths to the outside world. An assembly of signboards outside a photo shop in Buea, for example, read the following: 'Married passport, lottery passport, American passport, Holland passport, urgent passport, 4x4 Visa passport.' The imaginary of emigration is intrinsically tied up with conceptions of papers. The advertisement of a 'married passport' and an 'urgent passport' points towards the im-

portance of marriage and money in relation to travel documents. Throughout the country, I also noticed small posters that advertised the sale of travel documents and different types of other migration brokerage services: from limited advice to all-encompassing trips and bushfalling tours.

Bushfalling is the act of going out to the wilderness (i.e. the bush) to hunt down meat (i.e. money) and bring back home the trophies. It is under the term of bushfalling that emigration is currently imagined and envisaged in Anglophone Cameroon. To fall *bush* implies trying against all odds to leave the country to go (i.e. fall) and earn money to send back to the family in Cameroon. A person who has successfully travelled or migrated is called a *bushfaller*. Successful bushfallers are expected to generate and send back money for the survival of the family.

The town I lived in during fieldwork had two bars respectively called *Bushfaller Spot* and *Bushfaller Bar* (see photo 3). While the topic of out-migration is eminently present in Cameroon today, the current obsession with transcontinental migration and travelling is a new phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1990s the term bush emerged to refer to the 'white world' – largely understood as 'the West'.<sup>2</sup> In its broader meaning, any place where there is money can be called bush.<sup>3</sup>



3. Bar in Buea: Bush Faller's Spot

<sup>1</sup> Bushfalling has become the topic of numerous songs and films. Some popular films on bushfalling are: 'Mama G in America'; 'Osuofia in London'; 'Back from America'; 'The Master' and 'Paris a tout prix'. Some popular songs on bushfalling are: 'I wanna be a bushfaller' by Awillo; 'Njumboss' by Eriko and 'Si tu vois ma go' by Koppo.

<sup>2</sup> For a more extended discussion of the meaning of whiteness in the contemporary Cameroonian context, see (Nyamnjoh & Page 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Migration destinations in other African states are mostly not considered as bush. See also (Pelican 2009: 232).

Most bushfalling in Cameroon takes place via the airport and not overland. The most attractive places of destination are Europe and the U.S. My research also shows that many bushfallers actually end up in China or Dubai.<sup>4</sup> Inspired by a radio show, I conducted a survey with 100 respondents in different neighbourhoods asking what they would do if they were given 2.5 million CFA. The greatest part of all respondents - 38 percent - said that they would use the money to conduct business and 26 percent of all respondents wanted to use the money to fall bush. If I regroup these respondents with those that wanted to do business to be able to fall bush - five percent - and those who wanted to use the money to study in bush - six percent -, then a total of 37 percent of all respondents wanted to use the money directly or indirectly for bushfalling (see graph 1).<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the political anthropology of migration. Through the methods of ethnography, I trace how young Cameroonians dare to emigrate. I first became interested in the topic of migration through (practical and academic) work on human trafficking. The paradigm of human trafficking often limits migrant women to the role of victims. While films and Internet may portray unrealistic images of life in Europe, I argue in this book that the paradigm of trafficking has equally given birth to unfounded expectations of why and how young women in West Africa seek emigration. The focus on the illegality of migrants and the victimhood of migrant women overshadows the choices, motivations and difficulties of aspiring migrants before they set upon their journey. The purpose of this research project is to develop an alternative view on migration that focuses on the quests and struggles of aspiring migrants when still in their country of departure. The phenomenon of bushfalling serves as a key entry point to study the degree of control of migrants over the outcome of migration trajectories in a framework that is informed by people's perspectives in a place of departure.

I qualify unwanted or uncertain outcomes of migration trajectories as migratory risks. Given the limits of the administrative and legal category of trafficking, the concept of migratory risks is a broader and more open notion that enables me to better understand the hurdles and possibilities within the governance of migration as they occur to aspiring migrants. Following Desmond, I weigh risks using the lens of values and belief systems of aspiring migrants and their family members within their social environment (2007: 267). I shall begin by drawing on the case of my research assistant Delphine. She has helped me to explore what does or does not constitute an acceptable investment and sacrifice in the quest of social and geographical mobility in Cameroon.

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4 Within a quantitative survey among 100 respondents that I conducted in May 2008, the most popular destinations for bushfalling was the U.S., followed by Germany, the Netherlands, the U.K., Scandinavian countries, South Africa, Belgium, France, other African countries, Canada, Spain and China. The survey covered 50 percent men and women, as well as three different neighbourhoods of varying income groups. For further details about the methodology of the survey, see Annexe 1 and 2.

5 As pointed out above, I conducted the survey in three neighbourhoods with different socio-demographic characteristics. In graph 1, I have marked separately the results from respondents in Mile Sixteen, which is a poorer and less-privileged neighbourhood in Buea. It is striking to note how the rate of people in Mile Sixteen who want to use the money to build a house or buy a plot of land is much higher than the rate of people who want to fall bush.

## Ambitions of mobility and conditions of impossibility

During an entire year, my 25 year old research assistant Delphine refused to take her salary because she wanted to save up her salary to be able to travel to bush.<sup>6</sup> She was determined to add to her salary money she received from boyfriends, ex-boyfriends and family members to go to bush. She wanted to study in either South Africa or Europe. Based on what she had heard from others abroad, she planned to study and hustle. As I explained above, hustling in Cameroon means to try and be ready to do any kind of work. Both men and women can hustle. In Pidgin, the word to hustle often refers to work done in bush.<sup>7</sup>



4. Paris a tout prix Film Poster

To obtain the goal of studying and hustling in bush, Delphine was willing to give money to a migration broker. In the midst of the transcription of yet another interview on the hardships, struggles and sufferings of undocumented migrant woman whom I had interviewed in Europe, Delphine jumped up, laughed and proclaimed: 'Je veux go a tout prix!'<sup>8</sup> In her exclamation, she made reference to a Cameroonian film of the title 'Paris à tout prix' that came out in 2008. The film portrays risks and potential downfalls of migration, such as unwanted sex work, money swindlers, failure and deportation (see photo 4). After watching the film, Delphine just shrugged her head, viewing these issues as the 'bad luck' of the protagonists. Delphine was ambitious and determined: 'Bush a tout prix!' She was going to go at any cost and in any way. If others had been unlucky, she would work hard on getting bush right. She was going to

have success and bush was the only means and place to get there.

In our research, we repeatedly came across migration brokers that failed to send out their clients and families who had invested money in vain into the bushfalling projects of their children.<sup>9</sup> Yet, Delphine would not change her mind about wanting to go to bush. Half way through fieldwork, one of the informants

6 In order to save money,, Delphine first kept it a secret that she was working for me and later pretended that her salary was about a third of what it actually was. This way she was under less pressure from her siblings and her wider family to make financial contributions.

7 For the usage of the word hustling in Nigeria, see (Chernoff 2003).

8 As Delphine was referring herself to this Francophone film, she mixed the title of the film 'a tout prix' with both Pidgin and French.

9 In the quantitative survey, 14 percent of all respondents indicated to have already paid money to a place or a person without having been able to fall bush in the end. Initially, this question was designed to gain an estimation of the exposure of informants to duping amongst migration brokers. However, this number also includes respondents who have spent money on application fees for foreign universities, embassies or for getting the passport.

whose bushfalling trajectory Delphine had been transcribing was deported back to Cameroon. Delphine saw first hand how impossible Manuella's life had become in Cameroon.<sup>10</sup> Although they became friends, Delphine did not trust, believe or take seriously Manuella's advice. Why should the bad luck of others discourage her? Whatever the odds, she wanted to see bush with her own eyes.

Why did Delphine want to go to bush at all cost? Why in the face of deportation, duping, stories of hardship in bush and the advice of people that had been in bush, did she remain so very resilient? In this thesis, I set out to provide a response to this puzzle. In doing so, I seek answers to the following research questions:

- What makes young Cameroonians migrate at all cost?
- How do young Cameroonians try to achieve their ambitions of mobility?
- How do state institutions, migration brokers, migrant women and family members interact to shape the risks and gains of migration trajectories?

Delphine is not an isolated case of extreme fixation on bush. The level of enthusiasm about the possibilities of bushfalling is high in Cameroon in general and in Anglophone Cameroon in particular. Eighty percent of all respondents in my survey said that they would like to fall bush<sup>11</sup> and twenty-nine percent had actually tried in concrete ways to go abroad (see graph 2).<sup>12</sup> Above all, young Cameroonians - not yet married and of both genders - are eager to try and make their life outside of the country.<sup>13</sup> Families are willing to mobilize considerable sums of money for both their daughters and sons to go to bush.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the gap between desire and capacity to travel abroad is vast. In my survey, only five percent of all respondents had actually been able to travel to bush.<sup>15</sup> In relation to bushfalling, the experience of having tried, but failing to travel out is extremely common. To understand the eagerness of Delphine and others wanting to fall bush at all cost, the gap between aspiration and capability needs to be taken into account.<sup>16</sup> Many young Africans today experience their place in the world as having been abjected (Ferguson 1999: 236; Piot 2010: 77 & 94).<sup>17</sup> Central

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<sup>10</sup> I will be discussing this dynamic in greater detail in chapter five.

<sup>11</sup> This number also includes people that want to go to bush for holidays or studies. Not all of these respondents wanted to go to bush to work or stay.

<sup>12</sup> These emigration attempts spanned from applying for admission with foreign universities abroad to engaging conversations with family members abroad whether they could 'bring them over'. For further details, see Table 1.

<sup>13</sup> Fleischer has pointed to a gendered difference between the pre-migrational marital behaviour of men and women. According to her research, Cameroonian men are able to migrate alone even after they are married while married women face more difficulties in leaving the country without their husbands (2009: 238). Yet, just as women, men nevertheless prefer to fall bush when they do not have a family in Cameroon.

<sup>14</sup> In a survey conducted in the 1990s, Seraphin established that more than half of the questioned population in Douala would like to migrate or at least travel out of the country. Most that would like to emigrate are young, of a higher level of education and not yet heading a household (2000: 200- 201).

<sup>15</sup> None of these five respondents came from Mile Sixteen (see also footnote 5).

<sup>16</sup> Carling has equally argued for the importance of an understanding of involuntary immobility for the study of migration (2002: 5).

<sup>17</sup> Ferguson has defined the state of abjection as the act of 'being thrown aside, expelled, or discarded' (1999: 236). In this sense, abjection is different from mere exclusion.

for this particular sense of exclusion is not the cost of migration, but the absence of visas (Rosny 2002). Cameroonians perceive the world as closed off. Possibilities for air travel out are referred to as *lines*, *openings* and *programmes*.

In an age of supposed globalisation, the movement of large parts of the world population remains remarkably restricted. While the free flow of capital and commodities is often celebrated, the free circulation of people - and by extension thus workers - is often seen as a problem (Comaroff 2000: 300). My PhD research takes these paradoxes between mobility and closure as its starting point. As a consequence, my dissertation brings the experience of immobility and failed emigration attempts into the study of migration. I examine the challenges aspiring migrants and their families face, as well as the ways in which different actors try to achieve their ambitions of mobility. In view of young Cameroonians like Delphine, I study attitudes towards the costs of migration, flows of information and understandings of success and failure.

I begin the introduction of this dissertation by tracing, through the example of Delphine, how migration manifests in contemporary Cameroon. After exposing how secrecy and success relate to the topic of migration in Cameroon, I situate the emergence of bushfalling in Cameroon historically. My research has been driven by the desire to provide an alternative narrative to that of human trafficking. In the second part of this introduction, I unravel how the paradigm of trafficking has motivated me to study ethnographically the governance of migration from the geographical and temporal standpoint of departure. In the third major part of this introduction, I explicate the theoretical framework through which I analyzed the regulation of emigration. I conclude with an outline of my adopted research methodology and a preview of the following chapters.

## **Migratory risks and information**

Delphine was the first in her family (and one of the very few in her compound) to graduate from university. She is from a modest family. Both her parents are illiterate and complement the pension of the father through working the soil.<sup>18</sup> In the fifties, they moved from the North West Province to 'work money' on the plantations at the coast.<sup>19</sup> In the South West Province today, families from the North West Province are looked at as 'strangers'. Due to tensions between North and South Westerners, Delphine's mother was forced to give some of the land she was farming to feed and educate her children to South Westerners who claimed that it was

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<sup>18</sup> Having Ngie, Ngwo and Pidgin as their main three languages, neither parent speaks English.

<sup>19</sup> To 'work money' is an expression in Pidgin that I have chosen to keep, as it reflects well the idea that prior to migration, her parents have worked the soil. Delphine's parents were not the only case in which was mobility closely related to a further integration into the money economy.

theirs. Delphine's father also lost a plot of land to a group of South Westerners that claimed it had not been rightfully purchased.

Bush is today's version of what was then migration towards plantations at the coast. While migration as a means of integration into the money economy is part of the family history of all North Westerners in Buea, actual exposure rates to what it takes to get and be in are low. I will demonstrate how information on migration pathways does or does not flow, as well how it is received and interpreted. While enthusiasm for migration is predominantly discussed in terms of lack of information about realities in Europe, at stake is whether and how information is trusted as credible.<sup>20</sup> I will demonstrate how decisions to migrate are not based on knowledge, but on interpretations of knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

### ***The imminence of departure: secrecy, jealousy and bad luck***

Every time my landlady was absent for more than one day, my neighbour would jokingly ask whether my landlady had fallen bush. Despite endless repetition of the joke, her question never failed to entertain the people in our compound. 'Where have you been all this time? I haven't seen you in ages. As if you had left for bush!?'<sup>22</sup> I often overheard such conversations and was once in shock myself when I could no longer contact an informant of mine. None of her telephone numbers worked and her house was deserted. Now that Mamie Comfort had left, I remembered the times she had confidently shared that she might try to rejoin her brother in the U.S. A few weeks later, I discovered that her visa for the U.S. had been denied, yet, I had learned a lesson. Preparations for international journeys are largely well-guarded secrets.

As pointed out earlier, few actually make it to bush. Many travel attempts falter. Thus secrecy is paramount to avoid embarrassment and gossip in cases when travel projects come to an unexpected halt. Secrecy in the preparation to leave for bush is furthermore crucial as it increases the chances of actually being able to make it out. In Cameroon, witchcraft is often said to cause the failure of migration. Because migration is related to success, jealous people can seek to prevent the success of others through witchcraft attacks.<sup>23</sup> Secrecy can prevent the jealousy of others and thus render migration safe.

I was often told stories about mysterious disasters happening to people on their way to the airport. Delphine told me, for example, the story of a girl from her quarter who, after many failed migration attempts, sought out the spiritual protection and prayer of her pastor and finally received her visa. On the day that she was meant to leave, something strange happened in Cameroon so that no airplanes

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<sup>20</sup> While Fischer, Martin and Straubhaar, for example, mention that people process information differently, they have very little to say about how and why different interpretations occur (1997: 65).

<sup>21</sup> For other discussions of migration choices, see (Carling 2002 & Barak 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Original: 'How you loss so? A don stay for see you like se you go na bush!'

<sup>23</sup> The 'notion of effortless gain at the expense or even consumption of others is echoed in various witchcraft beliefs and feeds into cultural imaginings of migration' (Apter 1999). Urban migrants can, for example, be suspected by members of rural communities of origin to have used occult forces to enrich themselves (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998).



could come in or out. The girl's flight got delayed and she was only able to leave a few days later. People afterwards said that if the girl had left on that particular day, she would have died. A witch had been waiting for her at the airport on that day.

Fears of jealousy and witchcraft mean that only secret emigration trajectories are safe emigration trajectories. Given that also the extended family is seen as a possible source of jealous and occult dangers (Geschiere 1997), even close friends and family members will often only be informed a few days before the departure date. As a consequence, the departure of people for bush always seems imminent. Anybody can be suspected at any time to secretly prepare to travel out. A standard greeting is: 'what are you so busy with? Are you chasing down your papers?'<sup>24</sup>

Yet, even when negative news about bushfaling does circulate, information can be interpreted in ways that do not change dominant views and contemporary understandings of migration. Those that have succeeded in getting to bush and proceed to talk negatively about bush are said to speak to prevent the success of others. Their warnings about bush are considered to be the fruits of jealousy. As another informant called Florence put it: '*White man kontri* is paradise on earth. [...] If anybody says *white man kontri* is not good, that person is a witch.'

#### ***Delphine: scholarships, cyber massas and doki men***

Delphine's choices after graduation were either bushfaling or marriage. So she started applying for MA programmes abroad. Even were she granted admission with a university in Europe, she was going to need a *doki* man. Doki men are migration brokers specialized in the production of the papers needed for emigration. 'After all', Delphine explained to me, 'not everyone can get a visa.'<sup>25</sup> She meant that it took special powers to be granted this privilege. I encouraged Delphine to apply for scholarships. For her, scholarships were a highly unlikely route towards bush. Instead of researching the scholarship institutions I wrote down for her, Delphine often came back with stories of men from international dating websites.

Delphine knew people who had succeeded in getting to bush with the help of a doki man. She also knew people who had succeeded in getting to bush with the help of a cyber mass, that is, a husband found on the Internet. Yet, scholarships were a relatively unknown access route to bush to her. Hence, it did not seem a reliable or trustworthy means of making it to bush. Scholarships were for others and something only I could believe in. Being a foreigner and newcomer to Cameroon, I don't think she trusted me to know what it really takes to fall bush. To browse dating sites, instead, was a more ordinary procedure to her.

A year of arguing over bushfaling at all cost finally came to an end when Delphine actually - against all odds - did win a scholarship for a Master programme in Europe. A former teacher of hers had forwarded her the information for the

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24 Original: 'Ha you over busy so? You de follow na doki?' To go to bush above all means following up on one's papers. These papers can be attained in any manner, both through official procedures, as well as through financial motivations. For further explanations of the term doki, see the two chapters on migration brokers.

25 Embassy requirements for visas are restrictive and in 1995 consulate officers considered they had to reduce the quota of granted visa demands by 50 percent (Rosy 2002).

application. When Delphine found out about having won the scholarship, she exclaimed that she was now on a different level: 'My level now na different level.' She declared that she now no longer had time for those Internet dating websites – or even men in general. She now no longer needed either to get what she wanted. She was eligible for a visa.

When the visa had not come available on the first promised date, Delphine got nervous. Whether for externally funded studies or otherwise, Delphine's path to bush was marked by fear and anxiety. Secrecy remained of the essence even for the scholarship route of falling bush. Delphine only confided with her immediate family and others who had been to bush before. Beyond that, Delphine kept her bush preparations a secret, and by extension I had to do so as well. Delphine traveled back and forth to the Embassy. Yet, when close informants of ours asked how Delphine was, I had to say that she was around and that things were as ever.<sup>26</sup>

It was awkward to have to keep a secret from close informants that had shared many intimate stories with us.<sup>27</sup> Not until Delphine arrived in Sweden could I finally speak openly again. I explained to neighbours and informants that Delphine had won a scholarship. Yet, despite my explanations, a doubt always remained in people's minds. What I was saying did not have the same weight as what everybody had been seeing. For the past year, Delphine and I had side by side every day. Now Delphine had disappeared and people knew that I was about to leave soon after.<sup>28</sup> It was clear that I must have been instrumental in aiding Delphine's departure. The rumour in Delphine's neighbourhood was that the 'white lady' had brought her over.

Delphine had disappeared and because her departure had been a secret, few people beyond her immediate family actually knew how and why she had been able to go: 'Delphine has left for the white world.'<sup>29</sup> That is the part of her migration trajectory that has become visible in her quarter. While Delphine's brothers and sisters knew she had received a scholarship, her mother simply knew that a njangi group had decided to give money to her daughter. In Cameroon, njangi groups are weekly savings groups. The word scholarship does not exist in Pidgin.

### ***Delphine: luck and trust in information***

Eleven months after Delphine's arrival in bush, she sent me an e-mail telling me about a phone conversation with an old friend in Cameroon. This friend had just come back from Nigeria to Cameroon. He had wanted to go to Spain overland via Libya with four male friends. In answer to Delphine's question on whether they had not heard how people were dying on that route to Europe, he replied: 'Some have died, some have succeeded. No risk, no money. We wanted to try our own luck.'

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<sup>26</sup> Original: 'I dey.'

<sup>27</sup> Among our closest informants, Delphine decided to only tell Manuealla about her scholarship. She would have confided with Pamella, too, but an occasion did not present itself before her departure.

<sup>28</sup> Foreigners do not need to keep their departure a secret. Instead, I was advised by my assistant and host mother to keep further arrivals a secret. For them, this secrecy was an extra guarantee for my safety.

<sup>29</sup> Original: 'Delphine don go white man kontri.'

Delphine never considered reaching Europe through the overland route. Even my informants who were the most eager to go and fall bush tended to recognise the physical dangers associated with this route. The only people I came across during fieldwork who had attempted this route were men. In principle Delphine's shocked reaction was not connected to her new geographical position in Sweden. She shouted at her friend and told him never to try again to fall bush in this way. Delphine now began to talk to her friend about the dangers of bushfalling in terms of papers (residence and work permits) and issues of legality.

During our period of doing fieldwork, Delphine had persistently waved away the relevance of any negative aspect she was told about bush, as well as anything she would hear about legal frameworks of migration control. As I shall be discussing further in the coming chapters, Delphine and many other young Cameroonians consider that it takes luck and/or a connection to be able to overcome closure and travel to bush. In this mental worldview, legality cannot explain the respective success or failure of migrants. As a consequence, Delphine's new narrative of how difficult it is to get papers in Europe did not fall on fertile grounds with her friend. Delphine told me that her friend responded to her warnings about illegality in bush in these terms:

*How about those who have documents? How did they manage to get theirs? The ways that those who have succeeded – we would have also used the same ways to succeed. Because we were very prepared for anything. We are men and men are smart.*

In e-mail to me, Delphine complained that her friend was unlikely to change his opinion about bushfalling at all cost. None of her explanations about the difficulties of Cameroonians in bush, she complained to me, 'mean [t] anything' to him. For the first time in over two years of ongoing discussions between the two of us on bushfalling, I found her to express fear, as well as a sense of concern that bushfalling could also have negative consequences:

*I am so afraid because I know that they will not give up and they will only try again. My fear is what may happen to them if they even succeed to cross Morocco. How will they manage? Oh my God!*

The passionate advocate of bush at all cost had turned - largely due to her stay in bush - into a person warning people not to go. She had ardently defended bushfalling as a precious dream and important ambition. Yet, in this e-mail from Sweden, she talked about bushfalling as an 'illness' that needed a 'cure'. This is a radical shift in Delphine's attitudes towards bushfalling at all cost.

Yet, her new attitude was in line with a discourse I had already encountered with a small group of elite students in Yaoundé organising in an NGO that was largely sponsored by the Swiss Embassy to fight 'illegal migration'.<sup>30</sup> As young

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<sup>30</sup> For public treatments of the theme of bushfalling in Cameroon that also include negative aspects of the phenomenon, see (Ngwa & Ngwa 2006; Ngang'hi 2006). *From Dust to Snow* is an edited volume that gathers mainly the voices of Cameroonian students abroad. As such, the edited volume is not at all a reflection of views and attitudes of Cameroonians still in Cameroon. Billet Retour was written by a Francophone student migrant in Russia who overstayed his visa after his studies and was after a period of imprisonment repatriated back to Cameroon. Another example that

students of a much more privileged class background than Delphine, the NGO staff had themselves a better chance of being granted a visa at the embassy. What distinguished the members of this NGO from Delphine was not their level of education, but the degree to which they were already connected with people and institutions in bush. It is connections rather than education that makes bush at all cost less desirable and travel and migration projects through other channels more attainable.

By fully appreciating the shift in 'level' and status that comes with having had and having access to the international level we can grasp why Delphine's new views on bush at all cost would not speak to and be relevant to her friends in Cameroon. After her arrival in Sweden, Delphine simply no longer *needed* to go for bush at all cost. Upon receiving an MA degree, Delphine was in a position to sign up for a second MA degree in order to prolong her residence permit. With only a university admission letter, her friends in Cameroon by contrast would have only had a small chance of being granted a visa. If Delphine was changing her views on bushfelling, it was also because she now had other means to achieve social and geographical mobility.

After a two page e-mail describing her horror and despair at the Cameroonian madness of wanting to fall bush at all cost, Delphine added in a short note that she was preparing to send money home for Christmas, but also to buy phone credit so that she could call and greet friends and family in Cameroon. She sent home 175,000 CFA (almost 300 Euros), equal to a good monthly salary of a well-positioned person in Cameroon. The money was able to take care of the school fees for her younger brothers and sisters, which must have been a considerable relief to her aging parents who receive 10,000 CFA - roughly fifteen Euros - every three months from their pension. They work as farmers to be able to pay for the rest of their expenses.<sup>31</sup>

Both the financial gifts and the phone calls demonstrated to everyone in Cameroon the power of bush. Before falling bush, Delphine would not have had the capacity to pay the school fees of her family members. Now that she was in bush she had the power. Through being in bush, Delphine was on a different 'level'. All those connected to her through kinship ties or friendship benefited from the occasional money streams or even just the added prestige of receiving phone calls from a bushfeller.

Through performing the ritual of calling from bush during Christmas, Delphine elevated the social status of those that she called. Any connection to bush

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includes a more critical stance on migration is the academic volume edited by the Cameroonian scholar Pondi. After a conversation with Professor Pondi, my research assistant disqualified his arguments as representing a typical *ajebotar* perspective. With *ajebotar*, Delphine referred to Professor Pondi's privileged socio-economic position in Cameroon (see also glossary). Whereas Delphine and other informants were reasoning on an individual or family level, Pondi was concerned in his argument on bushfelling with development on the African continent as whole. His main reference was the nation state or the African continent.

<sup>31</sup> At the national level, the average monthly salary that stems from the exercise of the principal working activity is 26,800 CFA. In the public sector, the average monthly salary in public administration is 124,300 CFA. In the formal private sector, the average monthly salary is 103,600 CFA. These data stem from a report on employment and the informal sector ('Enquete sure l'emploi et le secteur informel (EESI)) by the Institut national de la statistique (INS) (Evina 2009: 37).

has its worth – particularly when migration is possible because of connections and not because of information and knowledge on procedures. As a bushfaller, Delphine can now elevate the status of her family both financially and through the additional prestige of rendering international connection visible and apparent through phone calls.

## **The geographical and historical emergence of bushfalling**

Bushfalling is a local term with fundamentally local dynamics, yet also an important product and expression of powerful national and global forces. Below, I will look more closely at the role of both local and global dynamics within the emergence of bushfalling in Cameroon in the late 1990s.

### ***The black bush and the worldly bush***

Before the 1990s, bush only referred to backward hinterlands or forest areas. These days, the ‘Western’ world outside of Cameroon is a wild bush in which one hunts down money that is then sent back to families in one’s area of origin. A radical reversal in the meaning of this term has come about. How does one explain how the term bush has become the term used today for the big dream of migration in Cameroon?

In everyday conversation today, bush can refer to both the worldly and the rural bush. Far away from human settlement, the wilderness of the rural bush is also referred to as the ‘black bush’ (Fokwang 2006: 84). While bushfallers are highly admired, to call somebody a *bush girl* or a *bush boy* is an insult. It designates the person as ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’. The same term of bush hence designates both a highly desired and a deeply devaluated space. Yet, bush is not to be simply understood as only a geographical space.

Roitman has elaborated on how bush is ‘a space – albeit a discontinuous one – of certain forms of connection and integration’ (2005: 101). Because of this connecting and integrating function, bush is not just a ‘signifier of a return to the past, a regression, or a step backward in the teleology of developmentalist history’, but has by now become an ‘elusive and yet promising domain of a possible future’ (2005: 102– 102). In this sense, bush is both a space for new forms of wealth creation, but also a projected future. In this future, people that work the economy of the bush attain the means to ‘counter what they feel is the state’s monopoly over surpluses’ (2005: 32).

Literally speaking, ‘to go bush’ means to go hunting or to go to the farm, to work there, to sweat and then to bring back food to eat. The bush in the Chad basin area, for example, has become an important site of economic accumulation and socio-economic mobility. It is the essence of food and money that joins the two

seemingly contradictory meanings of 'bush' as in farm and 'bush' as in *white man kontri* or the 'West'. Both are a source of living. Both are places of productivity.

A person who has travelled to bush has to hustle, which means that he or she will accept any kind of work to be able to work money.<sup>32</sup> After having hustled, bushfallers are expected to return home and share their hunting trophies. Mobility here is a means to become responsible. Remaining within borders by contrast would be an act of escaping social obligations (De Bruijn, Van Rijk & Foeke 2001). Migration policy is based on the assumption that migrants want to immigrate only to integrate, settle and remain. Yet, the notion of bushfalling reveals a very different understanding of mobility. Bushfalling is a form of mobility that explicitly requires the migrant to return to his place of departure to share the money or goods that have been hunted down in the wilderness.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Precedents of labour migration***

While bushfalling is a very new term, mobility itself is deeply ingrained in the history of the region. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the slave trade flourished in the region that is today divided into Nigeria and Cameroon. Calabar, one of the main ports for the slave trade in West Africa, is situated not far from today's South West Cameroon. Centuries prior to colonial conquest, people in the Grassfields of what is today North West Cameroon were furthermore active in long-distance trade (Ngoh 1996; Nkwi & Warnier 1982).

With the formation of colonial border regimes, the transportation of goods and the movement of people in certain areas became subject to state regulation. With the creation of plantations and the introduction of money, new forms of mobility came into being in the region. Mobility became connected to wage labour. Hence, an understanding of the history of colonial labour systems provides an entry point to precedents of labour migration in the region.

Attempts by the German colonisers to integrate larger sections of society in Cameroon into a money economy were based in large parts on forced labour. In order for men in rural areas to be more productive for the colonial and monetary part of the economy, colonial authorities engaged in the forced levying of labour for the cultivation of cash crops (Cooper 1996). The recruitment of workers often resulted in the forced movement of people.

*The history of mobility in Anglophone Cameroon points towards the crucial role of the colonial state in instigating these movements. Colonies were expensive, particularly after the First World War. And hence they needed to be self-financing. A method of self-financing was to make the best possible use of plantations. For this, workers were needed. They were partly recruited from the North West province. Taxation was*

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<sup>32</sup> An IOM report lists as the principal sectors of employment of Cameroonians working in the informal sector: restoration, textile industry, construction work, domestic work, childcare, cleaning, care work, intensive agriculture (Evina 2009).

<sup>33</sup> During fieldwork, the notion of bushfalling was furthermore very rarely translated by my informants as wanting to migrate. Instead, they talked about wanting to travel.

*one instrument to bring people from the village into the money economy (and thus to make the colony financially more sustainable).*

Although a plantation economy already had been introduced in South West Cameroon during German colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century (1884-1916), the British administration further promoted the creation of tea estates in its Trust Territory of the Southern Cameroonian the 1950s. As a consequence, labourers came to South West Cameroon from the North West province and other neighbouring regions. In the British Cameroons, no use of direct coercion (as in German or French Cameroon) was exerted. The British succeeded in letting chiefs recruit labourers. The Tole Tea Estate (just ten minutes from Buea) almost exclusively employed women for work on its plantations. Some of those female labour migrants came together with their husbands; others migrated on their own to work in the South West.<sup>34</sup>

Due to these plantations, South West Cameroon has had and still has a relatively high rate of regional in-migration. In local terminology, 'immigrants' from the North West Province are referred to by South Westerners as *cam no gos* - that is people that came, but did not go away. This is the word for immigrants in Pidgin English. Most of my informants lived in the South West Province, but their village of origin was in the North West Province. The context from which they were seeking to travel for work in bush was one in which they were already considered as 'strangers' in their places of residence.<sup>35</sup>

In this sense, the bushfalling trajectories under scrutiny in this dissertation are in many ways but the continuation of a much older practice rooted within family histories, as well as within colonial and economic developments within the country. Not only were the protagonists of this book already considered as immigrants, their Anglophone identity furthermore placed them at odds with the predominantly Francophone state to which – according to their national identity cards and passports – they were said to (legally) belong.<sup>36</sup>

### ***From migrants as been to, to migrants as bushfallers***

Prior to the phenomenon of bushfalling, people that had managed to travel out of the country were referred to as *been to*. People who had been to the Western world were highly respected. Yet, the emergence of bushfalling as a term indicates an important transformation in the meaning and role of migration. To become a *been to* was associated with educational achievements, while bushfalling is associated with

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34 For a history of the South-West plantation economy and labour mobility in the region, see e.g. Konings (1993, 1995, 2001), Ngoh (1996) and Nkwi and Warnier (1982).

35 Given contemporary economic circumstances, I would argue that South Westerners have developed almost as strong a taste for bushfalling as the North Westerners.

36 Given that the public perception in Anglophone Cameroon, the regime disadvantages and devalues Anglophone Cameroonians. Jua even puts forward that Anglophone Cameroonians also seek out migration so as to gain national recognition or visibility by excelling in the international arena (2003: 22). For more on tensions between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians, see (Konings 2001 & 2005).

adventure and self-enrichment (Pelican 2009: 232). The emergence of bushfalling also represents a shift in understanding of cultures of success.

Ever since the late 1990s when the terminology of bushfalling first emerged, bush itself has come to define more and more the very notion of success. When a person with no education goes to bush and then comes back, for example, his 'level' and status will be higher than that of a person who has spent the last ten years studying and learning in Cameroon. In a context of massive unemployment and recruitment techniques that often rely on connections rather than qualifications, the perceived worth of education has been deteriorating and the promise of bush has been attaining high credibility. As the mother of a current bushfaller complained to me:

*And when Agatha was already doing her A level, you know as a young girl, some of them will want to follow life fast, fast, fast. I said no, just go gradually, if you reach your university. She said, 'ah university. You go to university, come back, there are no jobs. University or no university, it makes no difference. So the father had to raise money, look for people, look for a visa and that is how you find Agatha in Holland.'*<sup>37</sup>

Migration patterns currently take this specific form of bushfalling mainly due to two dynamics. First, bushfalling needs to be explained with reference to the structural adjustment programmes and the demise of work for the civil service as an access route to success and status in Cameroon. In a radio interview, for example, a listener called in to explain why he wanted to go to bush at all cost. The very popular local journalist challenged the views of the listener in the following manner: 'You know that it is difficult to get papers in bush. They go there and become like slaves that can't even come back here. Why do people still want to go?' The radio listener who had called in replied by pointing towards the dire situation of some civil servants who can go for eight months without receiving their salaries.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, policies related to the IMF structural adjustment programme drastically changed the economic situation in Cameroon (Konings 1996b: 252, Monga 1995). The economic crisis in Cameroon since 1992 has greatly decreased possibilities for the creation of wealth in Cameroon itself.<sup>38</sup> Due to the devaluation of the CFA in 1994, the real value of salaries - when they were indeed paid out - was reduced by two thirds. Education became still less of a guarantee for social status. Hence people in Cameroon today widely believe and uphold that the best place to work one's money these days is in bush.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Agatha is the only one in her family who has not gone to university. Cases in which young people delay or even stop their education in the hope of falling bush are abundant. Rather than education being seen as preparation or means to go to bush, bushfalling often becomes a substitute for education. A person who has persevered all the way to the level of graduate education, however, will not look at bushfalling in the same way as a person with fewer qualifications. A graduate teaching assistant at the University of Buea, for example, said about his own potential to fall bush: 'Will I throw away all those years of education and start from zero in bush?'

<sup>38</sup> In 2001, the Cameroon Tribute estimated the unemployment rate at seven million people. This represents about half of the working-age population. Officially, however, unemployment rates are estimated by the ministry of employment, labour and social insurance to only be at around seven percent (July 19).

<sup>39</sup> According to a report by the World Bank, remittances of Cameroonians towards their country of origin have considerably increased since 2001. Remittances were estimated to be eleven million dollars in 2000, 103 million in 2004 and



Secondly, emigration patterns that currently take the specific form of bushfalling do so because the offer of visas is not in harmony with the demand for labour in receiving states (Levoy & Verbruggen 2005; Baldwin-Edwards 2008: 1456-1457). Since the 1990s, immigration policies have changed and de facto resulted in a shortage of visas. Visas were not always as scarce and difficult to attain as they are currently.<sup>40</sup> Today, it has become very difficult for most Cameroonians to leave the country. The status of a bushfaller is precisely so very high because bushfallers have been able to overcome geographic exclusion.

The gap between people's ambitions for migration and available avenues for migration also means that family members outside of Cameroon have a special responsibility for family members still in Cameroon. A Cameroonian MA student in his mid twenties - who was lucky to receive a scholarship to pursue an MA course in Denmark - shared with me his experience of having been alleviated to the status of a bushfaller:

*Communication between Cameroon and bush only ever turns around three issues. [...] When people call you from Cameroon, they call to tell you that somebody has died, that somebody is ill or that they need money. When you call them, it's either to give them directions on how to retrieve the money or you shout at them to leave you alone with their problems.*

With only 30 or 50 Euros, a bushfaller can at times solve life-threatening problems. In the absence of health insurance and other social securities provided by the state, the presence of a bushfaller abroad can be crucial for the survival and well-being of a family.

So high are the pressures from family members in Cameroon that Cameroonians abroad refer to an image of themselves as victims of *nyongo* (Nyamnjoh 2005). In this popular form of witchcraft, its victims have to work as zombies to make money. Bushfallers in bush also have negative evaluations of the self-sacrifice that is necessary to live up to the often very high expectations of families back in Cameroon. They can feel threatened by their relatives through witchcraft attacks and at times joke about their self-enslavement to work for the latter's enrichment without consideration for their own personal well-being.

I repeatedly confronted aspiring migrants in Cameroon with the metaphor of bushfallers as victims of *nyongo*. Nobody ever wanted to really take seriously or respond to this idea. From the perspective of departure in Cameroon, working money in bush is a dream that elevates one's social status. The metaphor of slave work is a much more of a relevant frame of reference for Cameroonians outside of Cameroon. Anglophone Cameroonians that are not privileged in terms of their social origins or levels of connections to bush, will ironically accept neither the narrative of migrants as victims of *nyongo*, nor as victims of trafficking.

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167 million in 2008. These data stem from a 2009 report on 'World Development Indicators' by the World Bank, quoted in (Evina 2009: 58- 59).

<sup>40</sup> For example, until the 1980s, Germany did not require Cameroonians to apply for visas.

## **Human trafficking and the governance of migration**

My interest in migration began when I was working as an intern on a human trafficking project at UNESCO and later with the IOM.<sup>41</sup> Through this work, but also other encounters, I grew increasingly skeptical of the discourse and politics of trafficking. There seemed to be little space to acknowledge the choices and desires of people in other places of the world to want to migrate. In policies and anti-trafficking programmes, state interests to control migration seemed to prime over concerns for genuinely safe labour migration.

My MA thesis was based on interviews with migrant women from Nigeria and Cameroon considered by an NGO in Paris to be ‘trafficking victims.’ The dissertation contrasted the paradigm of ‘human trafficking’ with the migration experiences of West African migrant women working in prostitution in Paris. With this project, I began to think more broadly about human rights violations of trafficking victims prior to their migration, the living and working conditions of undocumented migrant women in countries of arrival and the ways in which their vulnerabilities came about by a multitude of economic, social and legal dynamics. Amongst multiple causes of vulnerability, there were state actors as much as migration brokers and employers.

I suggested it fruitful to consider ‘trafficking’ within a wider framework of voluntary labour migration, as well as within a continuum of vulnerabilities and respective human insecurities (Alpes 2010). In this study, I build on this approach. I look at migration trajectories from the standpoint of a society of departure. I consider the actors and factors that render a trajectory potentially safe or dangerous. I furthermore do not take for granted what is constituted as a migratory risk, but follow the experiences and views of aspiring migrants and their family members in Cameroon.

### ***From human trafficking to conditions of departure***

In its legal definition, human trafficking refers to the recruitment, transportation and exploitation of a human being. Essential in this legal definition are the existence of deception and manipulation, coercion and abuse of authority, as well as debt bondage and forced labour. Theoretically, the deceitful nature of the recruitment process and the exploitative conditions of work, rather than the type of work as such, qualify a migration trajectory as ‘human trafficking’ (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). In practice however, many policies are still predominantly focused on trafficking within the sex industry.

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<sup>41</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Since its adoption in 2000, the Palermo Protocol has become the central document used for purposes of defining and dealing with 'human trafficking'.<sup>42</sup> While smuggling takes its main concern with the security of national borders, trafficking is the concept that is supposed to take the security of individuals as its main and core concern.<sup>43</sup> Yet, in migration policies and programmes, the security of states often takes precedents over the security of migrants and/or individuals (Kapur 2005a: 31). The discourse of trafficking is furthermore often fashioned to act as justifications for paternalistic actions that in the end serve purposes of anti-immigration and abolitionism more than the human rights and human security of migrants (Andrijasevic 2010; Dottridge 2007; Mathieu 2007).

Ratna Kapur teases out the tensions between the paradigm of 'human trafficking', the movement of people for work and contemporary state-managed migration regimes in the following way:

*The construction of women who move - or are moved - as victims of a web of criminal networks lies in tension with the counter-narrative that regards the movement of labour as part of the globalization process in which the emergence of human trafficking and smuggling networks are parallel responses to the migration phenomenon that nation states, especially in the global North, refuse to address other than as an issue of immigration or criminality (Kapur 2005b: 118).*

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42 The full and exact name of the Palermo Protocol is 'United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children'. The Protocol supplements the 'United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime'. It splits up human trafficking into three distinct, but interconnected elements: a) the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person; b) by use of threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud or deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or giving or receiving payments of benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person; c) for the purpose of the exploitation in prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal or organs.

43 As a contribution to the project of international human rights of migrants and a corrective to the project of global capitalism, Des Gasper and Thanh-Dam Truong propose that human security constitutes a particularly relevant framework for the theme of migration. As an analytical lens that grew in part out of the field of development studies, human security goes beyond visions of security of either state or individual by also allowing for emphasis on the security of communities (2010: 14). Because of these benefits, I shall in the chapter on marriage migration draw on the framework of human security.

Two key propositions follow from this:

- The exploitation of migrants cannot be blamed exclusively on criminals. Current migration regimes have created a high demand for migration brokers. By putting the blame of exploitation on supposedly criminal migration brokers, the paradigm of trafficking renders invisible more structural causes of exploitation and vulnerability.
- What is portrayed and treated as human trafficking is more adequately understood as labour migration. Even with elements of deception or force at play, migration is always related to the need or desire for work, including work in prostitution.<sup>44</sup>

In some of the academic literature on migration, ‘human trafficking’ has now come to be understood more broadly as a form of exploitative labour migration or forced labour (Van den Anker 2009, Andrijasevic 2010, Vernier 2010). While this understanding of trafficking is productive in many ways, both legally and sociologically speaking, the nature and exact meaning of exploitation remains elusive. For me this implies a further need for empirical research with migrants, aspiring migrants and family members to find out their respective visions of what constitutes a failed or an acceptable migration trajectory.

Legal rubrics - like ‘trafficking’ - do not capture people’s experiences and hence the unreflective usage of legal definitions in sociological analysis is extremely problematic. With respect to refugee studies, Malkki remarks how much the ‘bureaucratic and discursive domain’ has influenced the assumptions and questions of social scientists (Malkki 1995b: 505). Very much the same holds true for much of the literature on ‘human trafficking’. Some academic literature on ‘human trafficking’ uncritically uses the legal and administrative definitions of trafficking – without sociologically questioning the origins and implications of these definitions (for the distinction between administrative and sociological definition, see Anderson 2007: 12; Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron 1968).

Legal rubrics are boundaries around a group of personal histories. For an anthropological study, ‘informal’ migrants, refugees and ‘trafficking victims’ do not comprise a self-delimiting domain (Malkki 1995b; de Haas 2010a: 16). To conduct research on the basis of legal definitions and protocols results in a further naturalization of statist assumptions. In Cameroon, terms such as trafficking and smuggling are hardly of relevance for people’s understanding of migration. If one changes one’s geographical standpoint and looks at migration from the viewpoint of those departing a country, the success and failure of migration is understood through the language of bushfalling.

Rather than taking at face value legal distinctions between ‘human trafficking’ and ‘human smuggling’ or the distinction between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ migration,

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44 This is not to deny that some migrants do work in prostitution and that others do fall victim to criminals. Skrobanek makes the point that in most cases women freely chose migration and are only subsequently directed into exploitative channels (Skrobanek, Boonpakdee & Jantateero 1997: 98).

I follow Wong's call to analyse migration trajectories on the basis of the conditions under which migration projects are undertaken, as well as the agency of the migrant (Wong 2005: 87). In this way, the results of my PhD project will speak to concerns within trafficking debates without being driven by the parameters of its legal and administrative definition.

### ***From vulnerable migrant women to attempts at controlling migration trajectories***

It was my interest in sex trafficking that initially led me to focus primarily on the emigration trajectories of women. Upon arrival in Buea, I initially set out to work with narratives of women who were trying to leave the country, as well as of families who have undocumented migrant women in Europe. I thus matched undocumented migrant women in Europe with their families in Cameroon and gained insights into the ways in which illegality are seen and experienced in Cameroon.

Upon arrival in my fieldwork site, I quickly learned how common narratives of duping and of failed departure were and how little influence these narratives had on people's enthusiasm about emigration. Delphine's strong desire to emigrate and her conscious willingness to take risks to achieve her ambition of mobility was in stark contrast to the trafficking paradigm that assumes that brokers are the ones who instigate the migration projects.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to the trafficking narrative, Cameroonian women make their own choices about wanting to migrate. The pursuit of these ambitions of mobility are not so much - as the paradigm of trafficking suggests - marked by ignorance or naïveté, but by an interpretation of the reality of migration that calls into question ideas on credible information, success and failure.

In the context of high aspirations for migration and few access routes to achieve these aspirations, my interests is with the aspiring migrants' scope for choices at different stages of migration, their relation to the migration broker, as well as the level of insight and understanding of the process in which they engaged in. Constraints on agency can come to play the desires and beliefs of aspiring migrants, with respect to the competences necessary for autonomy, as well as with respect to the available choices or avenues of actions (Mackenzie & Stoljar 2000: 22). All three seem relevant for my purposes. In her analysis of female migration in Malaysia, Wong refers to the 'level of self control over the migration project' (Wong 2005: 87). The way she classifies instances and factors that limit this level of control over the outcome and process of migration is close to the concerns that I have in analyzing migration trajectories.

In the course of fieldwork, my focus of attention regarding migrant vulnerabilities shifted from gender-based more to legal and economic factors. In my predominantly Christian research location, I found that gender was not the *main* explanatory factor that would help me understand vulnerabilities having to do with emigration. Many comparisons between men and women can, of course, be

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45 For an empirical analysis of recruitment processes, see e.g. (Andrijasevic 2010: 31- 35).

made. Aspects that are specific to women are the framing of their trajectories as trafficking, as well as the recourse to marriage as a means to achieve ambitions of mobility. The demand for labour also operates according to different dynamics for men and women. Yet, this dissertation does not aim at comparing men and women per se because the law – even if in different ways - excludes *both* from ambitions of mobility.<sup>46</sup>

Regulation can differ by gender, but be nonetheless exclusionary or enabling in its overall effects for both men and women. Female and male bushfallers are, for example, constructed to spend their gain from bush in very different ways. Male bushfallers are said to be more likely to strive to construct new houses for their families. Female bushfallers are said to invest into the school fees of their family members, as well as other smaller family matters. It is furthermore often said that a daughter will always ‘think back to the family at home’, while a man may feel the need to spend and impress his friends and girlfriends. Female bushfaller have a better reputation for having a ‘good heart.’

Yet, despite these gendered perceptions of how bushfallers spend their money, family members were equally willing to raise money for the travelling projects of their daughters and their sons. When my research assistant and I conducted a qualitative survey in which we asked families whether they preferred to send their daughters or sons to bush, gender did not emerge as a deciding factor. From the perspective of members of family it was important to ensure that only members of family who could be trusted to work hard and be loyal to their people back in Cameroon would be sponsored to go out to bush. Prostitution rarely emerged as a fear for families in Cameroon. Instead, they spoke of the fear of disloyal or lazy bushfallers that would not support their family members in Cameroon.

A large part of the Cameroonian population is excluded from the possibility of being granted a visa at embassies and thus needs to attempt their emigration plans through the help of brokers. All the brokers with whom I worked offered lines indiscriminately for men and women. At times special programs for specific professional groups were drawn up. Thus women were recruited to work as nurses in Dubai or men were recruited to work as welders on construction sites in Dubai. While power dynamics between brokers and aspiring migrants obviously always are gendered, both aspiring migrant men and women needed to consider that they had better chances of being able to travel by seeking out the help of migration brokers.

In this dissertation, I argue that a concern with human trafficking calls us to look at people’s lives in source countries and the way in which these regions are globally connected with destination countries. The phenomenon of bushfalling is an important case in point that allows us to place the vulnerability of migrants into a framework that is informed by the perspectives of people in a place of departure.

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<sup>46</sup> Dalby has suggested ways in which mobility has become a luxury of the rich and developed populations, while fixity has become an encumbrance of the poor (1999).

### *From illegal migration to the regulatory dynamics of emigration*

In this dissertation, I follow Torpey who argues that the state has long remained under problematised in migration studies<sup>47</sup> Passports, identity cards and visas are means that seek to fix modes of belongings and simultaneously control mobility. Very often these state-defined forms of belonging are implicit in assumptions about the 'proper' or 'natural' place of belonging for people (Malkki 2002: 353).<sup>48</sup> As a consequence, mobility is often viewed as border crossing (Abraham & Van Schendel 2005: 11). Yet, migration can also be conceptualised as autonomous because it has already been occurring before state regulation (Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tsianos 2008). From this perspective, borders and border control – rather than just mobility itself – require attention.<sup>49</sup>

Two inter-related conceptual considerations, in particular, have marked the way in which I seek to contribute to the academic literature within migration studies. First, at the core of this research was the intention to go beyond 'seeing like the state' (Scott 1998). 'Due to their symbiotic history with the modern state and its interests [...] contemporary social sciences are ill-equipped to make sense of transnational flows' (Abraham & van Schendel 2005: 5). Hence, much research on transcontinental migration is conducted from the perspective of 'the migrant-receiving nation state' that looks at immigrants as 'outsiders coming in, presumably to stay' (De Genova 2002: 421).

My PhD research instead privileges the study of migration from the perspective of individual migrants, migrant families and the region/country from which they come. This is a much-needed move as many studies of transcontinental migration are often studies of immigration and integration. Kyle and Siracusa stress the need within debates on smuggling and trafficking to shed light on the 'empirical reality of how migrants themselves view their actions' (2005: 155). Through engaging in an ethnographic manner in a study of emigration, my study strives to address this gap.

Secondly, it is not sufficient to look at migrants and their experiences. If concerned with the illegality of migration, we need to study the processes that create the conditions of illegality. De Genova argues that the construction of migrants in terms of their 'legality' or 'illegality' effaces other aspects of their migration trajectories, namely the importance of labour markets for the flow of people and the expectations and demands of families. Yet, states frame migrant workers without pa-

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47 'Analyses of migration and migration policies have tended to take the existence of states largely for granted, typically attributing migration to a variety of socioeconomic factors (push-pull processes, chain migration, transnational communities, etc.) without paying adequate attention to territorial states' need to distinguish 'on the ground' among different populations or to the ways in which the activities of states – especially war-making and state-building – result in population movements.' (Torpey 1998: 240).

48 Malkki has greatly contributed to unravelling the underlying assumptions on the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995). Anthropological studies have explored in great depth the complexities implied in questions of belonging, as well as the struggles that these complexities lead to (see e.g. Nyamnjoh & Rowland 1998; Pelican 2009; Ndjio 2006b; Geschiere 2009).

49 Karakayali and Rigo (2009), for example, suggest that circulation itself constitutes an act of citizenship. This line of argumentation legitimises mobility and gives importance to forms of subjectivity that are not state-defined.

pers as ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘smuggled aliens’ or ‘trafficked victims’. Through their legal categories, states thus legally produce the illegality of migration trajectories (De Genova 2002).

Legality and illegality need to be considered separate processes of historical and political constructions prior to an analysis of how these terms are used to label people, activities or trajectories. Scholars need to also study the logics and norms inherent in processes of regulation that demarcate people and activities as in violation with legal frameworks. By studying how people experience emigration trajectories, I question the place of the law at points of departure. In the course of the following chapters, I will consequently only bring up illegality as an issue when and where and how it becomes relevant for actors.

Finally, we also need to relate illegality to other normative frameworks that regulate migration trajectories and their outcomes. While I argue for a theoretical shift from ‘seeing like the state’ to ‘seeing the state’, state authorities are not the only authorities important for the trajectory of a migrant. While laws try to regulate migration, migrants do not only have subjective experiences of these instances of state regulation, but are also exposed to other regulatory frameworks such as the market or the family. Besides legality, the profitability of a migration trajectory is important, as well as the honour it brings to the family members of a migrant.

This is why I have chosen to study the regulation of emigration within a framework that captures the multitude of ongoing dynamics within which aspiring migrants seek to move out of Cameroon. I look at the ways in which migration is regulated and I do so in a way that goes both beyond the perspective of the state and the mere and exclusive focus on the state. Beyond the regulatory instruments and norms of the state, I broaden the perspective to take into account the plurality of regulatory authorities that shape the context in which aspiring migrants move. With this work, I hope to contribute not only to a literature on ‘illegal’ migration, but also more widely to a theoretical body of political anthropology and its relation to migration studies.

### **Plural regulatory authorities: state, market and family**

It is striking that the flow of people is often analyzed through entirely different theoretical frameworks from the flow of goods (Malkki 2002: 352; Kearney 1986; Carling 2002: 5). Academic work on flows of goods notably adopts less often an explicitly statist perspective (McKeown 2008). This difference can most probably be explained by the high degree of legitimacy that the flow of goods has attained in the contemporary era.

Through historical analysis, Torpey has illustrated how states have monopolized the authority to restrict movement. He does not argue that states have effectively monopolized control over movement, but that states have achieved a mo-



nopoly over the legitimacy of movement control. In his work, he traces how the monopolization of this authority by states has emerged gradually in Europe after the medieval period and was paralleled by the states' monopolization of the legitimate means of violence. Torpey places his argument within the context of Meyer's work on the delegitimation of organizational forms other than the nation-state. While the state can prevent a person from crossing national boundaries, Meyer points out how the attempts of non-state associations to control people are stigmatized as slavery (Meyer 1987: 53).

It follows from the state's monopolization of legitimate means of control, the question of what occurs with other potential claimants of authority. The state with its laws and regulations is not the only authority that regulates the conditions under which people seek to realize their ambitions of mobility. Torpey argues that private economic, religious or other social entities claim authority at the 'behest' of states. This is a claim that I wish to investigate further within my dissertation.

In the context of the Chad basin, Roitman has conceptualized connections and overlaps between actors engaged in cross-border trade in innovative ways. She argues firstly that regulatory authorities have pluralized and secondly that the pluralisation of regulatory authorities has led to an increase in state powers (2004a). For an analysis of dynamics of emigration, Roitman's study of cross border trade can be instructive. In the case of cross-border trade, smuggling and gang-based road banditry in the Chad basin, Roitman argues that authorities regulating access to possibilities of wealth accumulation have multiplied. Roitman defines an authority as an instance that exercises power (2005: 18). Hence, not all regulatory authorities of trade or migration have to be official or authorities sanctioned by the state. Indeed, activities that are not regulated by the state can also be highly organised, recognised as legitimate and, as such, become institutionalised in their own way.

In line with Hibou (1999), as well as Chabal and Daloz (1999), Roitman stresses the productivity of these activities for the (urban) economy and for the financing of local administrations. The wealth that is created in smuggling and banditry is also used to pay state taxes, as well as to directly complement the salaries of state officials. Rather than seeing unregulated trade as trade that occurs in opposition to or to the deficit of the power of the state, Roitman proposes to look at interdependencies between various regulatory authorities in a way that fundamentally challenges conceptions of wealth, legitimacy and, by extension, also the notion of legality and illegality. Both on a financial and moral level, smuggling and road banditry are not constructed as or enacted against the state.

If the state is relativised as one form of modern political authority among others, it becomes possible to go beyond statist visions of migration. The usage of its own dominant (and mostly legal) categories can be avoided (Abraham & Schendel 2005: 6). That is why I study state officials, migration brokers and family members as important figures that regulate migration trajectories. These multiple players can be said to cover the sphere of the state, market and family. Within the sphere of the state, the role of paper seemed at first sight to be important both as a regulatory instrument and a means of self-representation. Within the sphere of the market, I focused on the role of migration brokers and the impact of money. Within the

course of the dissertations, however, I will demonstrate how the important role of money cannot be limited to the work and activities of migration brokers and vice versa.<sup>50</sup> The crucial point here is the novel ways in which spheres of the state, market and family interact and overlap with one another.

I look at state, market and family as three constructed spheres that allow me to analyse the multitude of at times contradictory expectations and demands that set out the context within which aspiring migrants go about their ambitions of mobility. By encompassing market, state and family actors, the theoretical approach of this dissertation seeks to go beyond the analysis of structuralist scholars that place migration in world systems and focus on market and economic disparities (Sassen 1988; Massey et al 1993: 444). I also seek to go beyond network approaches that look at migration through the lens of family connections, ethnic networks and social capital (Levitt 2007; Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1992; Nyberg Sorensen & Fog Olwig 2001).

The sphere of the state, family and market do not in any way constitute self-contained units. Ideal types of stateness collapse once one starts to work ethnographically. I am thus interested in connections and intersections between the regulatory ambitions of all three spheres. In the chapters of my dissertation, I explore how money and marriage play a role within the embassies, how family networks deal with money and deportation, and finally how migration brokers are perceived and conceive of themselves as public authorities and figure heads. I also study how boundaries between realms of market, state and family are constructed.

In the conceptualisation of my research material, I seek to treat state and non-state governance within a common frame of regulatory dynamics (Ferguson 2006: 112). I use the term regulation to refer to processes of control and governance in its broadest sense. Under this term, I will consider all authorities that seek to rule, direct, adjust, influence and determine processes of mobility so that they are channeled as desired. I consider, not just intentional acts of regulation, but also constraints and difficulties that follow from regulatory logics of different spheres. Circulating normative expectations about the legality, respectability and profitability of a migration trajectory, for example, also shape the choices and moves of aspiring migrants.

I consider different regulatory authorities within a common framework even though regulatory instruments and ambitions are by far not all equal. State institutions, for example, will regulate migration with different normative expectations and tools than family members and networks of migrants will. Yet, while not all regulation is equal, I do not take for granted these variations. Instead, I study how differences in degrees of legitimacy and capacity between regulatory authorities are constructed. As we shall see in the course of the various chapters, the very construction of supposed boundaries between plural spheres of regulation can constitute acts of regulation that establish one regulatory authority as morally su-

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50 For a critique of the separation between culture and economics, as well as between kinship and market as a characteristic of modern Western thought, see (Geschiere 2000: 54; Appadurai 1986: 11).

perior over another. Different normative assumptions about legitimate monetary exchanges, marital unions and forms of paper production play an important role.

To theorize from the vantage point of a plurality of regulatory authorities allows me to analyse emigration trajectories in a way that is not state-centric, but instead grounded in empirical data on the relationships and interactions between brokers, state officials and family members. The supposed monopoly position of the state is always continuously under construction and this construction process deserves scholarly analysis.

### **Fieldwork in Cameroon: marriage, money and papers**

To ground my theoretical framework within the empirical realities in Cameroon, I chose to construct the methodology of my fieldwork around focal points central to the three spheres: state, market and family. I chose to focus on the role and meaning of papers, money and marriage within different locations and moments of emigration. Paper served as a regulatory instrument that specified the sphere of the state. Marriage is an important regulatory instrument within the sphere of the family. Money served as a focal point that highlighted market dynamics within the regulation of emigration.

Papers, money and marriage leave migrants with smaller or larger degrees of control over the outcome of their migration project.<sup>51</sup> Papers give access to state-sanctioned migration. Money can buy papers. Family connections or marriage can facilitate access to papers. Money is important for flight tickets, visa fees and the price charged by migration brokers for whatever services they offer. Family networks are important in raising the necessary money for migration. These three focal points help in the exploration of how aspiring migrants dare to attempt migration and also directly relates to my overall explanatory framework.

#### **Fieldwork site**

The data for this work was generated during thirteen months of fieldwork in Buea, one of the two provincial capitals of Anglophone Cameroon. I chose Anglophone Cameroon as my fieldwork location for several reasons. Having prior to this PhD worked with Nigerian and Cameroonian sex workers in Paris, I wanted to continue with research on conditions of departure in a Western African country. At the start of my research project, a Dutch NGO was also closely working with Cameroonian

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<sup>51</sup> As pointed out above, I borrow this particular operationalisation of the concept of agency from Diana Wong (2005: 87).

trafficking victims and I had met three of them prior to going for research.<sup>52</sup> As a research site, South West Cameroon promised to be a safe environment, as well as particularly interesting because of its history of mobility control and changing colonial state regimes.

Buea used to be the capital of the German colony of Kamerun. It currently owes its size and dynamic character to the university constructed there in the early 1990s. As a university town, Buea is densely populated with young people. Although all informants with whom I worked remain tied to their villages of origin either in the South or North West Province, this study is largely one of people's attitudes and levels of knowledge within an urban setting.

As pointed out earlier, Buea and the South West Province, in general, have seen massive flows of immigration during the last 100 years. The names of bars like 'Fungom Embassy' or 'Chemba Embassy' remind one how relative the very notions of home and abroad are. Such bars serve to welcome any new arrivals in Buea from the villages of Fungom and Chemba (North West Province). Most of my informants and their families consider themselves as strangers in the place they live. However, most Anglophone inhabitants of Buea (whether considered to be immigrants or not) have an ambiguous relationship to the predominantly Francophone state of Cameroon that came into existence in 1960.<sup>53</sup> The fieldwork site of Buea is thus a rich place from which to study perceptions and practices of mobility. The very history of the place disturbs artificial dichotomies of settlement and motion.

With one short interruption, I conducted fieldwork from September 2007 to the end of January 2009. Before my departure to Cameroon, people in Europe warned me that it would be very difficult to research potentially 'illegal' migration trajectories and was hence given all sorts of advice on how to present my research topic so that it would not seem too offensive. Yet, thanks to the warm welcome and unfailing support of two staff members at the University of Buea, I was quickly able to integrate into the social fabric of life in Buea. Once I had brushed up on my Pidgin, I was literally met with laughter when seeking to explain my research topic to Cameroonians. What had been a scholarly ordeal to formulate in my research proposal could in my research proposal could be summed up in one simple word that was immediately accessible and comprehensible to anyone in Anglophone Cameroon: bushfalling. I was working on bushfalling and to hear a white woman speak Pidgin and be seriously interested in bushfalling always and with no failure evoked laughter and amusement.

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<sup>52</sup> Initially, I had intended to focus my research more closely around the narratives of these three women, as well as their families back in Cameroon. Yet, one of the three women was no longer in touch with her family. An international NGO was in the process of trying to help her locate her family. The other woman was still in the process of her B9 legalisation procedure and thus did not want to participate closely in the research. The third woman shared her migration narrative with me and also put me in contact with her family in Cameroon. Yet, it turned out that she had not been in contact for her family for many years and that her family did not even know that she was in Europe. While this certainly was an interesting finding, it did not generate further routes for research and I thus extended my scope to conditions of departure and conceptions of bushfalling in general.

<sup>53</sup> As Fokwang points out, many Cameroonians feel betrayed by the Biya government, but young Anglophone Cameroonians, in particular, considered that there was no prospect for them to ever become proper citizens in Cameroon (2006: 84).

In certain pages of this dissertation, I may write in a tone that could be criticized for verging on the ridiculous. Yet, this tone of mockery and amusement is not dissimilar to the ways in which Anglophone Cameroonians talk about bushfalling themselves. To stay true to this tone is not to disregard the serious effects for families that lose their entire savings in failed bushfalling attempts or the impossibility of life of those individuals deported back to Cameroon. Instead, the humour with which bushfalling is associated in Cameroon might reveal another element of the phenomenon of bushfalling.

While information and communication technologies mirror the hope of participation on a global level, political and legal frameworks impose exclusion. Apadurai has described this situation that has come to characterise social life in the global South as an 'ironic compromise between what can be imagined and what social life will permit' (1991: 198). If the compromise between imaginary and reality is 'ironic', then jokes about bushfallers can relieve the tension. I was at first surprised to see my research matter discussed in such a humorous tones in Cameroon. However, the joking tone with which bushfalling and bushfallers are discussed in Cameroon may also be a way of dealing with the tensions between global ambitions and the meagre possibilities for realisation. As Roitman and Mbembe put it, 'to laugh means not only to hypostasize domination, but also to mark the non-correspondence between objectified violence and the fear that one endeavours to admit and avert (1995: 351-2).'<sup>54</sup>

### **Case studies**

Although in my prior research I had heard much about brokers and facilitators, I had not thought when I left for Cameroon that access and contact to broker would be possible. The trafficking and smuggling discourse was so strong that I simply assumed that brokers in Cameroon would be conducting their work in greater secrecy and under higher protection. Yet, during fieldwork, I rather unexpectedly managed to gain the trust of a migration broker in Buea through the personal introduction of a lecturer at the university. Because migration brokers are big men, he was proud to open up his office for research. The presence of a white person at his office was a welcome increase in his status and appearance in society and he was most probably also hoping that I would generate useful contacts for him in Europe. Yet, he willingly opened his doors to my Cameroonian research assistant Delphine. Whether to white or Cameroonian, male or female, he liked showing off his powers.

Only ten years prior to my research, migration brokers would not have been present to this extent in Cameroon. At the time that I was in Buea, two of these migration brokers even had offices in town. They were firmly established. Yet, a

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54 The desire for migration in Cameroon has often been ascribed as being rooted in new cultures of material success and Western models of consumerism (Fleischer 2009, Jua 2003, Rosny 2002). However, these aspirations are not always exclusively material (Fischer, Martin & Straubhaar 1997). The emergence of migration in the form of bushfalling also stems from the above-described tension between aspirations for global belonging (Ferguson 2006: 192- 193) and the meagre potential for fulfilment.

year after my departure from Buea, news reached me that both offices had had to close. As one of the brokers had told me during research, bushfalling is a volatile and ever-changing business.

Thus having established a first entry point with one major migration broker in town, I worked on indirect introduction routes to the two other migration brokers that I had heard about in Buea.<sup>55</sup> Particularly two of them were very open to let me into their offices and allowed me to follow them in their daily working routines. I was able to ethnographically observe how they go about their work. Yet, because a lot of their work occurred outside of their office, Delphine and I were of course not able to follow the entire chain and networks through which the brokers conducted their work.

However, both broker offices provided convenient spaces for the research in which Delphine and I could come into contact with men and women who were aspiring and concretely working towards travelling out of the country. Delphine and I always made sure to clearly indicate that we were researchers and thus not co-workers of the brokers. And after an initial meeting in one of the migration broker offices, we always met with informants either at my home, their home, or occasionally, in bars or restaurants. For the research, I chose those case studies that promised to yield the most in-depth insights about the ways in which money, paper and marriage interconnect within emigration attempts.

Despite the secrecy that surrounds specific emigration trajectories, Anglophone Cameroonians greatly enjoyed talking about bushfalling. Throughout fieldwork, my white presence constantly evoked my research topic. As an Anglophone and Francophone German national who after a few months fluently spoke Pidgin, I embodied travelling and thus also a variant of bushfalling. The fact that I was a white researcher also made it easier for aspiring migrants to share the secrets of their travel preparations with me. Although I was not always given the exact departure date, I was generally considered more as a potential source of help than as a threat. I could thus be led into the inner circle of those who were trusted with the details of travel preparations and was barred from the imperative of secrecy.

It was very rare for me to be confronted with direct requests of people to make them travel. Due to my student status, I was not necessarily considered to be powerful enough. Yet, my close association with Delphine and two lecturers from the University of Buea (U.B.) also meant that informants, acquaintances and neighbours would not have dared to ask for help or services in manners that would have been considered as inappropriate or disrespectful by either. In the few exceptions, my response very much depended on the situation of the individual. In the case of students, I tried to provide links of websites with study information and scholarship openings abroad.

During fieldwork, I was also able to gain access to the French and American Embassy. A chain of personal contacts led me from a theatre group in Amsterdam

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55 In the absence of a personal connection that could introduce us, I first sent Delphine alone to make enquiries with some migration brokers in town. Once she had spoken to them and found out a few basic elements of their brokerage work, she then proceeded to introduce me to the brokers on subsequent meetings in their work places or in public.

to the doors of the U.S. consulate in Yaoundé. In a similar fashion, an accidental encounter in a train from Amsterdam to Paris generated a contact with the French Embassy in Yaoundé. Besides these personal entrance routes, I was also a likely candidate to be allowed entrance to both embassies due to my academic training at Sciences Po Paris, which most French consulate staff attended themselves. I was thus easily integrated as an 'intern' for a few weeks to observe the functioning of the consulate office.

Besides many smaller cases, interviews and observations, my research has over the course of one and a half years (and in some cases longer) followed the emigration projects of above all ten women. Six of these women were North Westerners; four of them were South Westerners. During the course of research, I worked within their family networks and thus also followed the migration projects and aspirations of their brothers and male members of family. I equally matched up five undocumented migrant women with their respective families of origin in Cameroon. One of these informants was deported during the course of fieldwork. Along with my various key informants, I conducted nineteen recorded and fully transcribed interviews. Yet, the second pillar of my research material was founded on observations of three migration broker offices (with its various employees and their respective family members), as well on observations from two consulate offices in the capital of Cameroon.

To be able to ground these narratives, as well as the ethnographic insights from the broker and Embassy offices within a firmer framework of size and scale, Delphine and I also conducted a quantitative survey in Buea. With the survey, I sought to measure the density of out-migration, the popularity of bushfelling, exposure rates to deportation, as well as attitudes towards money and bushfelling (see graph 1 & 2, as well as table 1). Finally, the ethnographic material on the mobility/immobility nexus is also supported by additional archival and visual material.

### ***Methodology***

All interviews and conversations were conducted in Pidgin, the lingua franca of Anglophone Cameroon. As many specificities of the culture of emigration in Cameroon today become visible through Pidgin terminology, I always include the original Pidgin (either within the core of the text or within the footnotes). Most conversations were relatively casual and I thus made notes only to the extent that it seemed appropriate so as not to disturb the flow of conversation. I then used these notes as much as possible immediately after most encounters to support and complete the recording of my field-notes. For key informants, I would at later stages of the research conduct fully recorded semi-structured biographical interviews. During the write up of the thesis, I sent draft chapters to three key informants and integrated their comments and reactions. For the sake of anonymity, the names of all informants have been changed in the manuscript.

I came to employ Delphine as my research assistant right from the beginning of my pilot study in September 2007.<sup>56</sup> Because of Delphine's own strong dreams of bushfalling, she became both an informant and a research assistant to me. On the first day that we met, Delphine greeted me with *Madame*, a term that speaks of respect and is used for lecturers at university. As we set out with our research day after day, we went from *Madame* to *kojokojo*, a slang term in Pidgin, abbreviated as *kojo*. It translates as very good and dear friend and because of its slang origins implies a rather playful and intimate mode of interaction. When it came to the formulation of objectives and directions, I was (as she would at times call me) the 'boss' making the ultimate decisions. Yet, Delphine also invented a different role for herself. She would regularly look in her pocket mirror, check her makeup and declare to me proudly that I had a beautiful 'mother'. As my mother, she would teach me Pidgin, advise me on what gifts to bring to our informants and make sure that her 'child' (in Pidgin *pikin*) would not be embarrassed by having a house with no food to offer to informants, neighbours or friends that would come by to greet and visit. Depending on the circumstances, she would thus jokingly call me *madame*, *kojo*, *boss* or *pikin*.

Although on rare occasions Delphine was challenged by friends or neighbours whether she was working for or with a spy who would further complicate people's chances to travel out of the country, Delphine herself was proud of the research that we conducted. For a long time, she even insisted that she did not want her name to be replaced by a pseudonym. She strongly identified with the project and highly regretted my choice not to put a photo of her on the cover pages of the book. She believed in the importance of our research and wanted the world to know about bushfalling to correct the somewhat distorted 'white man' way of looking at immigration. Delphine and I continued to discuss bushfalling and various draft chapters when she was already in Sweden and I was back in the Netherlands. Delphine also came to live with me in the Netherlands for six weeks over the summer months in 2009 and we were able to continue our discussions and interactions when she – against all odds and expectations – had indeed become a bushfaller.

## **Departure**

Seeking to explain why people take high risks in their quest for mobility, I illuminate in the next five empirical chapters different spaces (i.e. migration broker offices, embassies, airports) and moments (i.e. monetary transfers, departures, returns) of migration as they manifest themselves in Cameroon. I will discuss relations between brokers and clients; the emergence of migration brokers and their rela-

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<sup>56</sup> I followed the precious recommendations of two lecturers at the University of Buea here, Robert Akoko and Evelyn Tegomoh. I remain very indebted to their invaluable support all the way through fieldwork and much beyond.



tions to instances of state authority; dynamics during visa interviews at embassies; diverging quests for security in the case of marriage-related migration attempts; as well as perceptions and experiences of deportation. Through explaining dynamics of security, connections, luck, security and visibility, each chapter will contribute elements of response to the overall puzzle of bush a tout prix.

Within the economy of emigration, brokers are the main authority for people that are seriously trying to achieve their ambitions of mobility. The first chapter zooms into the relations between brokers and clients and the way in which both deal with the loss of money. It also addresses the involuntary return of aspiring migrants. In discussing the relations between brokers and clients, in the first chapter I shed light onto attitudes towards financial investments, notions of success, as well as conceptions of what it takes to leave the country. Fundraising dynamics within families and monetary transactions between brokers and aspiring migrants are instances that illuminate what I will call the market and family nexus. Through the key case study of Pamella, in the chapter I argue that relations between brokers and aspiring migrants cannot be discussed exclusively in terms of mere market or patronage relations.

From the perspective of an aspiring bushfaller, it is the migration brokers that offer visas. Interested in dynamics between state and market, in chapter two I study the sources that make migration brokers credible. In the discussion of the emergence of migration brokers, I address in the second chapter how brokers base much of their success and status on connections and knowledge, as well as on forms of papers production. Brokers are situated in relation to state authorities, without which the rise of brokers would not be possible.

In the third chapter, I focus on visa application processes and financial flows within and beyond the consulate offices in Yaoundé. In the perceptions of aspiring migrants, embassies are spaces of great danger and incertitude. Through a critical analysis of mediating technologies that govern visa application processes, I seek to unravel the seeming opposition between the narrative of legality and the narrative of luck. Narratives of legality and luck are sites of struggle over legitimate modes of mediation. And it is in this context, I will argue, that the frequent referral to migration brokers needs to best be understood.

Building on this insight in the fourth chapter, I use instances of marriage-related migration to analyse how state and family authorities seek security in diverging and conflicting ways. I will do so on the basis of a series of life stories and observations of marriage visa interviews at the French (and to a lesser extent the American) consulate service. Security threats for aspiring migrant women occur precisely because state and family locate security threats in conflicting ways.

As young Cameroonians dream of bushfalling and families keep raising the money for migration brokers, deportation is simultaneously becoming an ever more real possibility. Seventy-five percent of all respondents had a member of family who is in bush and nine percent declared to have a member of family who has been repatriated back to Cameroon. Nevertheless, bushfalling remains popular. In the final chapter, I study how deported migrant women and their members of family understand, experience and deal with deportation. Through and in-depth case

study of Manuella and a few contrasting cases, I explore the narratives of bad luck, bad behaviour and laziness that characterise the moral economy of deportation in Cameroon. I will offer an explanation of why it is not surprising that deportation rates have no effect on migratory choices of others.

In these five chapters, I strive to explain how and why young Cameroonians dare to emigrate. Based on observations and narratives of aspiring migrants in Cameroon, these five empirical dissertation chapters provide a picture of what people know, do and aspire towards before they set upon a journey to the Western world. In analysing step by step the various actions that aspiring migrants take in Cameroon, I seek, in this dissertation, to provide an alternative view of trafficking that opposes the dominant trend within the discourse of trafficking that negates people's migratory choices. Through the lens of this ethnographic study, the very meanings of security, credibility and failure might radically change.

## A line for 1.5 million CFA: Overcoming closure through migration brokers



5. Bar in Buea: 'Restaurant Schengen Place'

'It takes 1.5 million CFA to get to bush.' This was the very first thing I heard about bushfalling at the beginning of my fieldwork research. Upon arrival in Cameroon, I discussed bushfalling with students and staff at the University of Buea, I learned about 'lines', 'programmes' and 'openings', but also about 'closures' and 'feymen' that dupe people who want to leave the country. I was surprised at this vocabulary and began to explore how migration-related risks and opportunities are captured in Pidgin terminology.

In Anglophone Cameroon, possibilities for travelling are referred to as 'lines', 'openings' or 'programmes'. All three are emic terms through which the possibilities and impossibilities of migration are understood. The language, through which these possibilities for travel are referred, implies that access to mobility is difficult. To travel is understood as overcoming closure and hence travelling requires the search for openings. Thus the impossibility of travelling is a given at the point of departure. Even if one has found an 'opening' or a 'line', these can close at any time. The threat of failure is thus deeply ingrained in language referring to migration and travel. The

threat of failure is a pre-given and not located with the broker. Migration brokers, to the contrary, provide hope and the chance of being able to travel.

Given the risky nature of bushfalling and the ever-looming possibility of failure and closure, aspiring migrants need to 'rush' whenever they find out or hear about an opening. If one delays too much, the 'opening' can close again. Consequently, the success of a broker is evaluated by the speed with which he can deliver. If one has heard of a particularly good and safe 'programme', one talks about a 'direct line'. A 'direct line' is one that goes straight from a migration broker to the outside world. In particular, a direct line does not go via an embassy that could otherwise stop the emigration trajectory.

Lines, programmes and openings all refer to opportunities for travel. A migration broker can offer a line and a programme, but this language can also refer to other possibilities for travel. A scholarship announcement, a volunteer programme, a conference or a job offer can all be referred to as lines, programmes or openings. Only a line or a programme can overcome the hurdles that have come to be associated with wanting to travel out of the country. Besides its most literal signification, a line can also refer to a line of action or to a line of communication. These openings to bush *de facto* also imply job openings in the country of arrival, as well as the opening of a new chapter in the life of the aspiring migrant.

I was furthermore surprised to find that everybody around me talked about the price of these openings, lines and programmes in extremely frank and candid terms. When bushfalling initially emerged as a phenomenon in the 1990s, a line cost 1.5 million CFA. Since the 1990s, prices have increased. Nowadays it takes 1.8 million CFA to go to China or Dubai and roughly 2.5 million CFA for Europe or Canada. The precision and openness with which the 'fees' for migration brokers are referred are striking. Mobility is clearly understood in terms of needing to have money. The very terminology of informality and illegality (as much as the one of smuggling and trafficking), however, assumes the supposed under-cover, shadowy and invisible nature of the market of migration brokerage. Contrary to these projections, there is nothing hidden, opaque or illicit about the money that is necessary for the 'help' of a migration broker with bushfalling.

### ***Warnings against dokimen***

Embassies in Yaoundé do their best to warn Cameroonians against migration brokers. Notes of warnings are spread in public relations activities at schools, open days, radio and TV broadcasts, as well as on notice boards outside the embassy compound itself: 'Beware of dokimen! They are hurting your future.' 'These people are just making money out of your fears and ignorance. They are not the friend of the applicant.' The chief consulate officer made these statements, which I heard on an open day organized for journalists at the U.S. embassy in Yaoundé, pleading to journalists present to warn their countrymen not to go to the Embassy with the mediation of doki men. They are 'giving and selling bad advice on how to present visa applications.' The main message that is conveyed is that doki men are bad for visa applicants, as well as for the country as a whole. 'Protect yourself. Protect

Cameroon. Stop the doki men.’ According to the consulate officer, commercial mediation is a scam at the best of times. Most importantly, the quotes from the U.S. embassy show that relations between aspiring migrants and brokers are understood in terms of criminality and merely profit-driven commerce.

In the above statements (but also often in debates on trafficking and smuggling), migration brokers are supposed to be either criminals who break laws (Finkenauer 2001, Aronowitz 2009) or businessmen (Salt & Stein 1997) that instigate trajectories of migration. Yet, while embassies seek to denigrate migration brokerage to the realms of crime and commerce, the first point of departure for aspiring migrants is not the embassy, but a migration broker or a member of family who has already succeeded in getting out. I was very surprised at how invisible embassies are in people’s perception of what it takes to emigrate. In the social imaginary, it takes extraordinary powers or money to be able to overcome closure and make it to bush. Migration brokers are the ones who have the ‘power’ to make the impossible possible. For 1.5 million CFA (so the saying goes) anybody can go to bush.

Large amounts of money are given to migration brokers in the hope of a potential emigration project. At times families even take out debt to finance emigration attempts and many times the money invested comes from important financial reserves for retirement or the education of younger ones. Although failure is common, migration brokers continue to be able to gain new clients who entrust them with large sums of money. While often accused of being criminal businessmen, the migration brokers with whom I worked in the field were greatly admired. This puzzle is at the heart of this chapter. Why in the face of uncertainty do aspiring migrants trust and hand over large sums of money to migration brokers? In addition, in what terms can power relations between brokers and aspiring migrants best be understood?

### ***Relations between migration brokers and aspiring migrants***

This chapter approaches the theme of migration brokerage through the vocabulary of openings, lines and programmes. Using this approach, the purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on migrant-based understandings of migration-related risks. The chapter investigates brokerage relationships by focusing, amongst others, on monetary exchanges between aspiring migrants and migration brokers, as well as on social interaction in the case of problems and failures of emigration attempts. Through the lens of social interactions and financial transfers, this chapter seeks to empirically establish the place and role of migration brokers as actors within the economy of emigration.

In this chapter, I argue that both the languages of crime and commerce are inadequate to understand relations and financial flows between actors. Whilst Salt and Stein have already established the point that crime is not a useful framework of analysis for brokerage activities, they uphold the distinction between ‘legitimate’

and 'illegitimate' migration (1997: 489).<sup>1</sup> According to this distinction, recruitment consultants, travel agencies, transport operators, legal and advisory firms are clearly distinguishable from trafficking organisations. From the point of departure, these distinctions seem highly questionable.

I try to go further by pointing out that migration brokers do not function exclusively according to the laws of the market. I argue that the money entrusted to migration brokers needs to be considered in relation to both the risk of immobility and the authority that a migration broker represents in Cameroon. The authority of brokers depends also upon their reputation and status within society. This is why I will also introduce patronage (Bayart 2009; Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Smith 2007: 11-16) as an important relation explaining relations between aspiring migrants and migration brokers.

I will demonstrate that from the perspective of aspiring migrants, the failure of migration brokers is not substantially different from the failure to get a visa from the embassy. When embassies deny visas, aspiring migrants also experience a loss of money. In addition, while migration brokers can fail with their programmes, the outcomes of travel projects that pass through embassies are highly uncertain as well. Hence, the failure of both migration brokers and embassies are considered in relation to each other.

This chapter includes a conceptual discussion of migration brokerage and three empirical case studies. In the conceptual section, I position the two key migration brokers of the case studies in a context of wider forms of mediation in Cameroon, highlight my approach to the question of smuggling and sketch out how I seek to contribute to a better theorization of migration brokerage. Through the three case studies, this chapter demonstrates how migration brokers are central actors of the regulation of emigration. Through the help of an ethnographic description of a trip of a migration broker to the airport with an aspiring migrant, the first case study illustrates the high status of migration brokers within the economy of emigration, as well as the set of expectations that are present with aspiring migrants. The second section of this chapter examines the financial politics of monetary choices within the family network of Pamela. Finally, in the third case study of Victoria and her brother, I argue for the importance of the symbolic value of the monetary transfers between aspiring migrants and migration brokers. The transformative potential that migration brokers offer helps to explain why many aspiring migrants and their members of family do not consider giving money to a migration broker as a substantial risk.

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<sup>1</sup> More specifically in relation to human trafficking, Andrijasevic, too, challenges crime as a factor within cross-border migration trajectories for purposes of sex work. In one of her chapters, she questions notions such as deception, coercion and force as distinctive elements of trafficking at points of departure in Eastern Europe (2010: 26-56).

## **Conceptualising migration brokers**

Migration brokers are feared, yet also greatly admired and respected. Despite low levels of expertise and at times high levels of failure, mediators are in a position to uphold their status. The knowledge and connections of migration brokers are important assets – even if not at all times strong enough to deliver on all promises.

This section of the chapter argues for an understanding of migration brokerage through the lens of the relations between aspiring migrants and brokers. Relations of aspiring migrants with migration brokers cannot be understood without recognizing both the normality and necessity of mediating practices. I will first sketch the context in which the two key migration brokers of this chapter operate and offer their services. I will then further explain my approach to the study of migration brokerage and seek to trace its potential contributions to other bodies of literature.

### ***Migration brokers in Anglophone Cameroon***

‘There is much business in migration’, one migration broker told me over dinner. Both the migrant and the migration broker hope to make money with migration. Anyone with a comparative advantage will seek to share the gains of migration. When the period of the year in which the U.S. diversity lottery applications arrived, an informant and friend asked me to lend her my digital camera. For a small fee of a few hundred CFA, she took photos of neighbours and friends in her village and completed their application forms. Florence was less interested in the fee than the potential of somebody from her village of origin to leave the country. If somebody for whom she completed an application form had won, she would have gained incredible status and would have had the opportunity to marry this person or, if the winner was a woman, marry one of her brothers.

The range of facilitators and mediators of migration in Cameroon is vast. A poster on a public litter bin advertises ‘payment solutions’ for Toefl tests, paypal, hotel reservations and the purchase of flight tickets. The people who made the poster sell the possibility to pay online fees for language tests, to make online hotel reservations, reserve or buy flight or train tickets, or simply to use their paypal account for whatever online activity the client desires. In Cameroon, few people hold formalized bank accounts and even fewer have credit cards. Even seemingly, simple transactions need mediation. Without a credit card, making a hotel reservation abroad becomes a lot more complicated, and without a hotel reservation, one cannot (in most or many cases) be granted a visa.

Services change incredibly fast and the degrees to which mediated services are commercialized also vary. Cyber café staff charge 1,000 CFA (roughly 1.50 Euro) for filling out application forms for the American visa lottery, creating Internet profiles on dating websites and a bit more for filling in visa application forms online. People who are engaged in international trade can ‘carry along’ others or simply give out information on visa processes. Posters on the street of Yaoundé suggest

support with visa applications that require bank statements from countries of destination.<sup>2</sup> I ended up functioning as a broker many times, too – certainly not taking money, but often giving out information or advice.

Even NGOs whose *raison d'être* is the fight against illegal migration find that they cannot do so without also at times advocating for legal pathways of emigration. One group of well-educated university graduates had organized themselves as an NGO to 'fight' what they call 'illegal migration that kills'. Yet, on extremely rare occasions they would also write support letters for visa applicants – validating the travel objectives of certain of their contact people.

Lines between aspiring migrants and migration brokers are not clear-cut. Often people acquire skills due to an experience of failing to travel out with which they can later capitalize by selling migration services. On the other hand, pretending to be able to facilitate the emigration project of others can also be a means of making money for one's own emigration project. The friend of a neighbour of mine was desperate to go to bush. One day he was no longer to be found and it was rumoured that he had successfully 'knocked stick' (duped) somebody who also wanted to travel out of the country. Apparently, the money that he got out of the deal was not sufficient for him to fall bush himself. After a few weeks, he reappeared in our compound. Rumours continued to circulate about his supposed bushfalling attempt through duping.

Just as there are no clear dividing lines between aspiring migrant and brokers, it is important to realize that the field of commercial migration services is in and of itself multilayered.<sup>3</sup> A former employee of one of the migration agencies where I worked was kicked out of the office for reasons of fraud. He is now secretly offering his own emigration services, using his experience of having worked for a migration agency, but also of having once been duped himself to make money with bushfalling. It is an important additional source of income for him. To set himself up and be able to raise a family he needs more than what his teaching jobs can provide.

In the last ten years, a whole array of migration agents, brokers and facilitators has mushroomed (for some advertisement posters, see annexe 5). The Embassy is a distant institution considered to be hostile. Even if at times they seem more powerful than they are in fact, mediators are welcome 'helpers'. Despite potential failure, migration brokers keep being seen as experts in their field. They are powerful men who have connections and are considered to be 'known' internationally. They have powers to obtain visas that others do not – even if at times they fail, these perceptions largely remain intact.

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<sup>2</sup> The German consulate service in Yaounde, for example, requires applicants for student visas to prove that they have at least a monthly sum of 659 Euro at their disposal for the first twelve months of their degree course. If the sponsoring person does not reside in a EU country, sufficient means of subsistence can only be proven through a blocked savings account in Germany with 7.908 Euro in credit for the first year of studies.

<sup>3</sup> Daloz documents the multitude of layers and networks within which big men move, associate and ally themselves (Daloz, 2005: p. 158).



### *Migration brokers and the vulnerabilities of migrants*

Much of the academic writing on 'smuggling' and 'trafficking' locates the sources of the vulnerabilities of migrants and the causes of the failure of migration trajectories with 'traffickers' and 'smugglers' (Spener 2009: 201-229). The potential illegality is high on the agenda of most discussions about migration brokers. Categorised as either smugglers or traffickers, brokers are described in terms of the respective laws that they are breaking (nation state borders or human rights of migrants). This chapter seeks to contribute towards discussions of migration brokers by proposing a different perspective. Instead of understanding migrant vulnerability as caused by the actions of migration brokers, this chapter seeks to explain why aspiring migrants trust migration brokers.

I am interested in the policing of movement. The brokers referred to in this chapter partly prescribe and enable the mobility of Cameroonians. Mobility is made possible and is organised through migration brokers. Following Roitman's work on cross-border trade in the Chad basin (2005), I conceptualise migration brokers as one out of a multiplicity of figures within the economy of emigration.<sup>4</sup> Whilst states might claim a monopoly over the legitimate means of movement (Torpey 2000), this does not reflect the ways in which migrants engage upon their emigration trajectories. First of all, many migration trajectories occur without official state-authorisation. Secondly, the legitimacy of the state's attempt to monopolise means of movement can itself also be challenged. The means of movement migration brokers provide have gained currency and legitimacy – because of the fears that many aspiring migrants have of embassies. The case studies of this chapter demonstrate that migration brokers are recognised as exercising legitimate authority over access to possibilities for mobility and thence the right to mobility.

Spener points out how 'although the transactions between migrants and 'coyotes' [i.e. the Mexican terminology for migration brokers] take place outside the legal frameworks created and enforced by governments, they are nonetheless regulated by other important social relationships and cultural norms for behaviour (2009: 163).' Frameworks outside and beyond the law regulate brokerage relations. Granovetter (1985) has referred to this extralegal nongovernmental regulation of economic action as 'embeddedness', and it is an essential concept for understanding how migration brokerage takes place. Embeddedness, he argues, takes two forms. Relational embeddedness refers to the personal relations between parties to an economic transaction. Structural embeddedness refers to the broader network of social relations in which the parties to a transaction are inserted (Granovetter 1990: 98-99). This first chapter looks at the relational embeddedness of migration brokerage. The following chapter will dedicate attention to more structural forms of embeddedness.

Beyond working on the multitude of vulnerabilities and risks in a different geographical setting, my approach is different from Spener in that I do not attempt

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4 The plurality of regulatory authority does not necessarily imply the demise of state sovereignty or the rise of an alternate sovereign power (Roitman 2004).

to come up with an alternative social science classificatory system for an analysis of relations between aspiring migrants and migration brokers. So as to understand why and how aspiring migrants take risks and relate amongst others to migration brokers, I argue for the importance of local terminology such as lines, programmes, openings and closure, but also the ones of dokimen, big men and feymen.

The paradigms of trafficking and smuggling have a tendency to criminalise and stigmatise a broad array of migration intermediaries (for a critical analysis of such tendencies, see Spener 2009: 201-229 or Gisti 2010). Yet, the more legal migration becomes difficult and state actors discursively criminalise migration, the more migration intermediaries become necessary. The increased presence of migration intermediaries then further contributes to criminalise the act of migration. Thus given the scarcity of visas and the current economic situation of Anglophone Cameroon, the vulnerability of aspiring migrants is a given.

Risks and vulnerabilities between aspiring migrants and migration brokers thus need to be embedded into an overall analysis of conditions of departure. Through ethnography of relations between aspiring migrants and migration brokers, this chapter seeks to contribute towards a more empirically grounded understanding of the nature of migration brokerage (Kyle & Siracusa 2005), as well as to a more migrant-based understanding of migratory risks. I follow here Desmond's call that risk cannot be analyzed within a vacuum (2007: 9).

Kyle and Siracusa argue that migration services are commodities in high demand (2005: 158). Together with Liang, Kyle furthermore talk of 'migrant exporting schemes' when looking at out-migration possibilities for migrants (2001). In an attempt to move away from a predominantly criminal way of framing migration brokerage, Kyle and Liang define 'migration merchants' as 'anyone who profits from the migration of others regardless of legality' (2001: 4). With their concept of 'migrant-exporting schemes', they propose a model that considers the selling of migration services in terms of business. For them, a 'migrant-exporting scheme' turns into a 'slave-importing scheme' if most of the profits are generated by the unpaid labour of migrants in countries of destination. Whilst Kyle and Liang give recognition to the fact that migrant exporting schemes are limited by the need for trust (2001: 22), this chapter argues that profit generation is not a main factor in the structure power dynamics between brokers and aspiring migrants. The potential vulnerability of aspiring migrants towards their migration brokers is not grounded alone in the fact that migration brokers generate income with their work.

### ***From traffickers and smugglers to dokimen, feymen and big men***

As bushfalling is the pursuit against all odds of an opening in a context of closure, success is considered a question of luck and for success the connections of migration brokers are crucial. Prior failure (including through a broker) renders the need for a broker all the more necessary. Brokers have special knowledge on these matters, as well as connections. People prefer to go to bush with a broker because this protects them from people with bad intentions in bush.

Drawing distinctions between various kinds of brokerage, aspiring migrants talk about feymen, dokimen and big men. Feymen are con artist and trick businessmen (Ndjio 2006a; Malaquais 2001). They generate money through swindling and financial deception. Some feymen generate so much money that they can become local and national benefactors. Despite the often-unlawful nature of their economic activities, feymen are respected as wealthy and powerful men. In its current economic climate, all new forms of wealth have come to be closely associated with feymenia.

In my friend's perception, migration brokers that are feymen do not deliver and have no intention of delivering. They merely dupe their clients. Aspiring migrants always have to fear that their migration broker might only pretend to be big and powerful, but will actually dupe them. Dokimen are much less respected than big men. They do not have connections, but merely imitate and manufacture travel documents. The real migration broker that everybody hopes for is a big man. When an informant that had just handed over money to a migration broker was confronted by stories of duping, she responded that her broker was 'big' and that she could thus really trust him. Big men are powerful people with good connections. These connections give them the power to make others travel. The term 'big man' can refer to businessmen and politicians (Daloiz 2002).

Dokimen, feymen and big men are all three emic terms referring to migration brokers. These linguistic terms give us access to how the reality of migration brokerage is conceived in Cameroon. Any given migration broker is evaluated against these three ideal types.

To understand migration brokers as either 'dokimen', 'feymen' or 'big men' opens up an understanding of the horizon of expectations that aspiring migrants have. Aspiring migrants hope and think that migration brokers are big men, but if the level of respect goes down, then they might have to admit or understand that their broker was a mere dokiman. Whilst I have heard stories of duping, I have never witnessed a direct accusation of somebody as a feyman. As long as the relationship between an aspiring migrant and migration broker continue in one way or the other, aspiring migrants will not talk of duping. To be a feyman is to let the programme or line fail intentionally. Migration brokers are then measured not so much in terms of success and failure, but in terms of the genuine chance and possibility of trying to overcome closure in quest of an opening.

The typology of dokimen, feymen and big men is useful in that these terms indicate three different types of relationships. Aspiring migrants will trust and give over money to a dokiman with a different set of expectations and motivations than to a big man. The risk of giving money to a dokiman rests with the efficiency of the documents the dokiman will supply. The risk of giving money to a big man is located with the question of whether or not he is actually a big man. Feymen can pose as big men, but then proceed to merely dupe their clients. In this case, the intention of the migration broker would have been fake.

Whether or not the papers of any broker, however, would be classified as real or fake by state officials is not of concern and does not figure within the parameters of how migration-related risks are assessed. The typology of dokimen, feymen and

big men is unrelated to question of legality. Once I heard a migrant ask about the nature of the visa and the broker replied that a visa is a visa. Yet, this was the only time that legal considerations were brought into the discussion between broker and aspiring migrant. In line with the theoretical commitment of my dissertation project to trace perceptions of migration-related risks from the vantage point of aspiring migrants in a country of departure, I will only discuss questions of legality when these issues are of relevance to my informants.

### **A trip to the airport with Mr. Walter: brokerage relations and horizons of expectations**

On his way to Douala, the migration broker Mr. Walter picked me up to give me a lift. As we drove out of my compound, we passed by a young man in the pouring rain whom Mr. Walter had just dropped off beforehand. The young man's shirt was completely soaked. As Mr. Walter stopped his car, the rain kept pouring down on the young man. He begged Mr. Walter to offer him the six-month visa for Greece for two million CFA. That's all he had!

Yet, Mr. Walter claimed that the 'line' costs a lot more. Mr. Walter is in his mid 30s. As a former mathematics teacher, he now runs an NGO office in Buea that sells migration services. He talked about the quality of the programme and the many costs that he has in making this programme work. Mr. Walter did not want to reduce the price and enter into an agreement for only 2 million CFA. He would help only if the young man gave him 2.5 million CFA.

'You've seen how I am.' He touches his wet shirt. He has neither bag, nor umbrella. 'I am desperate.' Mr. Walter insisted on his price and told him that he has until next week to decide. Mr. Walter drove off in his four-wheel drive jeep and explained to me (his female company of the day) that 'the boy has surely been 'sent back'. 'To be sent back' is the Cameroonian expression referring to deportation. Desperately in need to go out again, he begged for another chance at becoming a true bushfaller.

The boy addressed one of the three major migration brokers of the town. It is mostly through connections and hearsay that aspiring migrants find out about possible 'lines' or 'programmes' of migration brokers. Aspiring migrants and their families travel from villages in Bamenda all the way to Buea to meet one of the two migration brokers with whom I conducted fieldwork. While some might have a destination country in mind, in general the country chosen for the travelling project de facto depends on the 'openings' in which a given broker can actually deliver. While it was safe and easy for the two main brokers with whom I worked to have people leave for Dubai or China, aspiring migrants preferred to travel to Europe or North America. In response to such demands and expectations, both brokers tried their best to expand the range of available programmes, but did not

always succeed to do so. If a line or opening to Europe failed, the brokers often offered compensation in terms of a trip to either China or Dubai.

I now explore how expectations shape relations between aspiring migrants and migration brokers. As a researcher, I was at times concerned with the safety of the migration trajectories that my informants were to embark upon.<sup>5</sup> However, in the analysis of my chapter, I seek to remain loyal to the issues and points that were of concern to my informants. The boy in the rain only had two million CFA and thus had to plead with Mr. Walter for help. The enforced immobility of his life was creating a degree of despair that turned Mr. Walter not just into a migration broker, but also a 'big man' who could save him from his situation.

As we continued our route to Douala, Mr. Walter – otherwise referred to as 'the boss' – explained the purpose of his trip. He had the case of a young Francophone man from Yaoundé who wanted to pursue his studies in accountancy in Malaysia. The boy had received his own admission letter, but did not know how to transfer the tuition fees to the university without a bank account or a credit card. There is no Malaysian Embassy in Cameroon. How to get the visa? How to pay the fees? How to get the ticket? How to make sure that the young man can really go out? In the face of so many unknown challenges, the family of the young man had turned to Mr. Walter for help. They agreed, but the fee was high and the family struggled to raise the money for the broker.

All the money had finally been gathered on the day that the boy was supposed to travel. Mr. Walter received confirmation that the money was complete, but the boy's passport was still in the capital. He had no visa and no flight ticket. There was no hotel reservation and no university inscription. In spite of this, Mr. Walter calmly assured me that the boy would travel that very day. Connections would make it possible. As we drove, he called a contact person. The boy would first travel to Laos – which is visa free – and then on from there to his final destination. The contact person was to prepare a hotel reservation for the boy in Vientiane. In addition, Mr. Walter gave me to understand that he would also 'pay the route' at the airport in Douala. Police people are 'hungry'. One never knows. Even with a hotel reservation for a visa free country, they could decide to pose problems. His connections, as well as his knowledge made the boss confident in his powers.

While we were stuck for hours in a traffic jam, Mr. Walter received many repeated phone calls from the now anxiously waiting accountant in Douala. When we finally arrived in Douala at about four p.m., we picked up the aspiring migrant and his mother at the roadside. He greeted us anxiously and said, 'Am I still leaving tonight?' The flight was to leave at eleven p.m. Mr. Walter was confident. 'The boy will go out.' He was set on the young accountant leaving the country that same evening.

Any line that takes a while and where preparations stretch over a period of time is a line that is potentially fraudulent. Any delay can speak for failure. Any

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5 If this was the case, I would discuss my doubts and concerns with my informants and if they desired would then proceed to explore whether I could find out about pieces of information that would enable them to make more informed choices about the emigration projects that they were about to embark upon.

kind of long-term preparation might be a side manoeuvre to divert the money. To avoid such suspicions and to prove one's power, brokers operate their lines fast. Speed is of the essence. Speed, in part, proves the true power of a broker. Hence, in this situation, there was no cause for concern. Walter answered to the aspiring bushfaller in French that everything was ready. After this statement, the real journey began.

The young accountant and his mother got into the four-wheel drive jeep. We drove through muddy roads with big holes. The mother wore lace. The boy wore a buttoned shirt and a formal looking pair of trousers. As we drove off, the boss broke the silence, 'You want your son to be a great accountant?' The mother nodded proudly. The plan was that the powers of Mr. Walter would help her boy reach his new university in Malaysia. Mr. Walter would turn her son into a bushfaller and thus a potential big man.

As we drove off, the boss asked the boy to type his name into his mobile phone. I took the initiative to ask the boy to type the name into the phone exactly as it was written in his passport. The boss then sent the name of the aspiring bushfaller as a text message to his collaborator who was supposed to be preparing the hotel reservation in Vientiane. None of the proceedings was explained to either mother or son. Part the obscurity of procedures keeps the mythical power of brokers in the face of imposed immobility alive. To fall bush is to be transformed into a different category of people. It is the dramatic nature of this transformation that makes the brokers appear so powerful and not the details of how their businesses operate.

The first stop was at a travel agency in Douala. As we entered, the travel agency felt like an entirely different world. The space was air conditioned, clean and full of colourful posters that spoke of the promises of another world. All employers wore suits and had an air of professionalism. The staff knew Mr. Walter. He quietly whispered to a clerk. I sat down in a corner with the mother and the accountant. As a big man, Mr. Walter was connected, known and clearly part of this air-conditioned world.

It was also the ease with which Mr. Walter moved through spaces connected to bush or prestige that gave him an air of power and authority. Delphine and I had sometimes jokingly referred to very expensive restaurants in Yaoundé as bush. The travel agency was a place of a similar standing. Not anybody would feel comfortable and assume that he or she could be a client there. Lost in the face of unknown institutions like embassies and travel agencies, the mediation of Mr. Walter was clearly indispensable. He was an Ambassador to this unknown place called bush.

The boss disappeared up the stairs and pointed out the toilet to the mother of the boy. She followed and after a while came out with an envelope of money which she had hidden by tying it into her lace dress. Most of the money was compiled of notes of 10,000, but some of the piles were notes of 2,000 CFA. The money had been taken from a communal savings group. In small weekly sums, members of savings group make regular payments - which are then during the meetings shared out to one member at a time.

Busy and with big steps, the boss flew down the stairs. The accountant's mother handed him the equivalent of a year's salary. As he sat down at the desk with one of

the clerks of the travel agency, an ‘embarrassing’ situation occurred. There ought to have been 1.3 million CFA, but the accountant’s mother had only brought 1.2 million – roughly 1,800 Euros.<sup>6</sup> Graciously Mr. Walter waived the missing 100,000 CFA. He explained to me that he often came into situations in which his clients were not fully able to meet up financially in which he ‘helped’ them by using his own money to complete the transaction. Mr. Walter repeatedly mentioned to me that quite a few of his ‘applicants’ still owed him money.

Narratives of duping are extremely common. To overcome initial doubt and suspicion, Mr. Walter maintained a very flexible discourse on modes of financing. Aspiring migrants have to make an initial non-refundable deposit. Afterwards, they are free to make payments at their own pace and convenience. At times, when the visa is obtained, recipients do not manage to mobilise the necessary money to pay him. In Delphine’s and my presence, he often boasted how he has already helped so many people who never had been able to complete all their payments. Any successful departure is good advertisement for him. Moreover, most times, with the high profit margin, he still makes a profit even if only two thirds of the entire fee have been paid.

This was the recurrent story line during the course of the one-year that I followed him. He was proud to point out how much money he was making, but remained very serious about his role as a helper and a benefactor. His gracious stand in the face of the needy and helpless was, of course, also aimed at impressing me as his white guest of honour, but ultimately his actions of ‘charity’ were instrumental in maintaining his personal reputation in town. I always got the impression that he enjoyed the act of generously waving off money, of being the one whom everybody owes and the one who has the power to save and help.<sup>7</sup>

It was four-thirty p.m. when we left the travel agency. The flight was to leave at eleven p.m. We got back into the jeep and the race continued. As often, traffic was rather chaotic in Douala and Mr. Walter shouted at another driver, ‘You are in Douala! Do we follow rules in Douala?’ Mr. Walter was beyond rules. It was but the strength of his jeep that mattered. The charm with which he acclaimed his own powers made us all laugh. There was something very light and playful in this rush to get to the airport. The whole afternoon seemed unreal and as if it was but a game.

As we circumvented holes in the road and other cars, the boss called back his collaborator, who had not yet made the hotel reservation. ‘L - A - O - S’, the boss shouted down the phone. ‘It’s close to China.’ I was shocked about the level of geographic skills of his collaborator. I later confronted him with this. The boss told me

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6 Based on a monthly salary of a state employed primary school teacher of roughly 100,000 CFA, this sum of money is equivalent to almost 12 monthly salaries.

7 Mr. Walter said in front of me that he was making a monthly profit of roughly 4,000 Euros. Most of Mr. Walter’s clients travelled to China. What he did, for example, was to officially buy return tickets for his clients (as visa requirements foresee), but arrange with the travel agency that it would only print the return tickets, but actually only issue and charge him for a single fare. The return ticket is required for the visa and for emigration controls at the airport in Cameroon. Yet, in the agreement that Mr. Walter makes with his ‘applicants’, he only promises to take them to China or any other respective country of destination. My research assistant was not at all shocked by this procedure. Bushfallers want to travel out, but will only return to Cameroon after a while.

that people's knowledge of bush in Cameroon is low. Apparently, this partly held true for dokimen and facilitators as well. Neither the accountant, nor the mother seemed to notice or to mind. Mr. Walter's air of authority radiated calm and confidence in the process. I was probably the only one in the car who was worried.

Our final stop was with a bus company called Guarantee Express. The accountant's passport had been sent from Yaoundé to Douala through the postal service of this bus company.<sup>8</sup> We had to pick up the passport. The mother did not want to get out of the car due to the mud and rain all around us. I somehow got out without getting too dirty. I followed Mr. Walter race around some cars and more puddles. Eventually, we reached the office of Guarantee Express and collected the passport that had been deposited earlier in the day under Boss's name. At this point, Mr. Walter tried to impress me with his powers and his smartness. He handed me a pen and triumphantly said that it had a hidden USB stick inside. With this CIA-like device, he could secretly steal information from people's computers. I do not know whether he has ever used his secret pen. He was visibly pleased with himself to possess one.

To finally have the passport at hand was another important step in the pursuit of air travel. In the whole haste and chaos of the matter, I asked the aspiring bushfaller about his luggage and it appears that he had a great deal. Apparently not being aware of weight and size restrictions and most likely assuming that all travel was the same, the accountant was a little startled at my interference. We had only met on the day of the trip itself.<sup>9</sup> When I talked to him about freight regulations and weight restrictions, he did not give the impression that he considered the information to be of great value or importance.<sup>10</sup> Buses in Cameroon are always filled to the brim with vegetables, fruits and at times animals. I do not know what the aspiring accountant decided to do about his luggage.

Boarding began at seven p.m. It was quarter to five p.m. when we dropped off the aspiring bushfaller and his mother somewhere in the middle of Douala and Mr. Walter drove me to the hotel where he was staying. He wanted to have a drink and eat. It was five p.m. By six p.m., we had discussed my research issues and his sexual desires for me. I then departed and he only now was going to prepare the university admission letter that the accountant needed to be admitted into the country at the airport in L – A – O – S. Mr. Walker was to meet the accountant one hour later for boarding at the airport.

The young accountant left the country that night. I do not know much about his onward journey from Laos to Malaysia. Such details would have been visible only to his immediate family. For others, the young man had left the country. He was in bush and he now was a bushfaller. That is why Mr. Walter was an extremely powerful man in his field - and even more so because he did it all in but a few hours.

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Walter had left the passport in Yaounde because he had first intended to make the accountant travel through another route.

<sup>9</sup> He does not know me as he was living in Yaoundé.

<sup>10</sup> Neither were weight restrictions a concern to my own friends who sought to give me kilos of food (pineapples, sweet potatoes, cooked ndole) as I was leaving the country.



With respect to the above narrative, one can see that procedures that grant access to bush are largely unknown. Hence, it is possible for family members to hand over the money to the broker on the departure day itself. Migration brokerage is necessary and considered to be normal. In a situation of closure, migration brokers, like Mr. Walter, are the ones with the powers to make visas come out. The largest part of Cameroonian society does not qualify for a visa, and hence somebody who can bring out a visa is admired and considered a powerful man. The above case study illustrates how power relations between migration brokers and aspiring migrants are structured.

The above case study has also illustrated that Mr. Walter is one of many regulatory authorities. These days both emigration and immigration controls at airports are conducted by a multitude of authorities. State agencies have partly outsourced some of their responsibilities for the upkeep of legality in international travel to the flight companies themselves who now operate their own security checks (Salter 2007: 54). Airport authorities employ private companies to conduct additional security checks on the papers of travellers. Thus, authorities have multiplied and Mr. Walter is one of these regulatory authorities. He always gets to the airport by car to ensure his people get out of the country.

Mr. Walter was able to arrange the young man's departure within this short time delay due to a combination of knowledge, connections and the skill of paper production. He knew about visa applications, visa free countries and indirect travel routes. Even when airport officials have doubts, Mr. Walters can guarantee safe passage at the airport in Douala. He also has contacts with people (both within and beyond the realm of the state) who can issue, produce, imitate and manufacture supporting documents that his clients need to pass immigration controls at the airport of arrival. Overall, his knowledge and his connections grant Mr. Walter an extraordinary position of status and power. He is a 'big man'. Not an ordinary line of business, his brokerage help brings upon a family such a promise of change and hope that he fulfils the role and function of a generous benefactor.

Having illustrated the social status of migration brokers as big men, the following case study and section of this chapter will continue to analyse moments when the capacity of migration brokers to deliver is at its limits.

### **Pamella: risking money at times of crisis**

Pamella estimated that her parents lost about six million CFA in trying to make her fall bush. When looking at the money that her parents had spent over the years on bushfalling, Pamella knew that they could have paid for her tuition fees at a foreign university. Yet, they repeatedly entrusted money into the hands of different migration brokers. Mr. James was one of the migration broker in question. Just like Mr. Walter, Mr. James ran NGO office in Buea that sold migration services. Mr.

James had a lower level of education than Mr. Walter and specialized in sending people to Dubai.

***Mr. James and Pamella's parents: surviving the younger ones***

Pamella's parents placed a surprising degree of trust in Mr. James. Pamella had tried three times on her own and twice with a migration broker to leave the country. Her visa was denied four times. She left a fifth time without a visa using an indirect route through Kenya and Egypt to Cyprus, but was turned around at Cairo airport. It is after five prior failures that Pamella's parents took up contact with Mr. James and gave him an initial amount of 500,000 CFA.

The money came from prior savings, small-scale trade with Nigeria and from a compensation payment for their early forced redundancy from the CDC plantations.<sup>11</sup> Pamella's mother added her own money through farming and through running a small pharmacy in the village. 'They are so desperate for me to go!' Pamella explained. After a year of repeated disappointments, they proceeded to hand over a further two million CFA to Mr. James, even though their daughter had been repeatedly warned not to do so. In the end, Pamella's parents were more motivated for the bushfelling project than Pamella herself. How does one explain Pamella's parents trust in Mr. James?

First, the risks that are part of trying to send one of the children out need to also be placed in relation to the routinised state of crises, i.e. the everyday nature of risk in Cameroon today (Mbembe & Roitman 1995; Van de Walle 2001). Cameroon's everyday life is characterised by much uncertainty (Johnson-Hanks 2005). Pamella's father hence wanted to secure a future for his wife and daughters and tried to do so by putting his money into bushfelling.

There was a very real risk that the inhabitants of his village of origin in the North West Province and more so the uncles of Pamella's father<sup>12</sup> would not have accepted that fact that Pamella's father had registered his two stores under the name of his wife and his eldest daughter.<sup>13</sup> Pamella explained to me that village custom has it that 'property [i.e. women] cannot buy property!' 'He has put down his will, but the uncles will be there nevertheless.' 'Legally one can succeed in trying to stop it, but it's risky. As an African, things can happen.' Even while he was still alive, Pamella's father's uncles had seized some of his cattle, sold it and squandered the money. They had insulted him because he had been 'wasting' his money on his female children. Pamella's father feared that his property would be seized when he

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<sup>11</sup> Pamella's father and mother were both born in the North West Province (Banso & Nkambe). They left their villages of origin to go and work in the Ndu Tea Estate in the North West Province. Both worked for a plantation company called Cameroon Development Company (CDC) until transferred to work for the CDC in the South West Province. The plantation company was privatised in 2002 and Pamella's parents were both made redundant in 2006. They have since moved back to the North West Province.

<sup>12</sup> These uncles are the brothers to the mother of Pamella's father.

<sup>13</sup> Upon their death, their belongings would normally go to the eldest male child in the family. Pamella's parents, however, considered their eldest son to be too irresponsible. For further details on financial dynamics within family networks in the North West Province, see Endeley (2001: 38).

died and that his wife and daughters would have to suffer the consequences. In this context, the financial risk of investing into Pamella's migration project takes another dimension. Pamella could take care of the younger ones when she was in bush.

Due to the death of two of Pamella's maternal aunts, her mother and Pamella's two sisters were in charge of the education of six more children. At the village level, Mamie Pamella was an educated woman<sup>14</sup> and it was her strong desire that the level of education for her children should not drop.<sup>15</sup> Yet, if not for bushfalling, there was no hope for the younger children to be able to go to university. 'Look at the children,' Mamie Pamella told me, 'Nobody is really in a position to 'survive' the others.' She needed her most educated daughter to begin to take charge of the remaining dependents.

Pamella needed to be sent out, not despite, but because of the financial burden for the education of the younger ones. Families were willing to sponsor even repeated bushfalling attempts because emigration is perceived as one of the few strategies that could truly make a difference to the family. Expected high gains legitimatised high risks. Their parents could raise money for bushfalling, but not for business. 'In Cameroon you work, but you don't see your money. In bush you see the money that you work.'

Secondly, Pamella's parents decided to give their money to Mr. James because they trusted him to be able to deliver. Pamella's mother told me that she considered Mr. James to be a man with 'connections' and hence to be a man of 'power'. She considered him an agent that worked with an NGO. She knew that Mr. James had sent out members of family of a family friend. 'A lot of people have already gone.'<sup>16</sup> Yet, she did not know where to or what these people were now doing in 'bush'. Pamella imitated to me how her parents were talking about her broker: 'Mr. James is big... he's big... he's big!' She complained that her parents were getting old and that Mr. James could easily tell them that this or that country would be good for her.

Pamella's parents had met Mr. James through a close friend of Pamella's mother who worked at the office of Mr. James. Pamella's 'uncle' served as a guarantee for the deal. In a conversation, Mr. James told Pamella that he could not afford to disappoint that man. 'I'm with him every day.' As a man from their village of origin and as a man of status in society, Mr. James was well placed to advise Pamella's parents as to what was good for their daughter.

The connection Mr. James had to Pamella's parents' village of origin also played a great role in the trust they had for Mr. James. However, such connections also come with other problems. The closer his own family was to the family of his clients, the more he would be under pressure and accountable to his clients if he did not live up to their expectations. When on a visit to one of Mr. James' s offices in Bamenda, I came across a woman who wanted to go to Dubai with the help of

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<sup>14</sup> After her redundancy from the tea plantation company for which she had come to the South West Province, Mamie Pamella began running a small pharmacy in the village.

<sup>15</sup> In Cameroon, mothers are often named after their children. Hence, Mamie Pamella is a popular way of referring to Pamella's mother.

<sup>16</sup> Original: 'Plenty people don go!'

Mr. James and who was from the same region of origin within the North West Province. The standard fee of 1,8 million CFA was too high for her and she was hence asking Mr. James whether it was possible for him to give her 'assistance'. She wanted to pay but 1.5 million CFA. He replied by stating that would be the equivalent of sponsoring part of the trip himself. Having worked closely with him, I knew that he was also in a position to offer the line for 1.3 million CFA. When I addressed the issue with him a few hours later, Mr. James explained that he did 'not want to have to do anything again with family.' Apparently, people from his home village had not been content with some of his services and had proceeded to complain. 'I'm here to earn a living,' he concluded.

This anecdote illustrates the ambiguity of relations that Mr. James entertained with people in his village of origin and neighbouring villages in that region, and more broadly speaking with family claims. On the one hand, Mr. James focused on generating income for his NGO. On the other hand, I heard his clients ask many times for 'assistance' with their travel projects. In addition to working as a migration broker, Mr. James also became youth director for a council of elders in his village of origin and organised activities for village youth that were living in the South West Province. In public events, he spoke in terms of working towards the 'prosperity of the family of the Cameroonian nation.' Yet, in practice, neither Mr. James nor Mr. Walter had a tendency to cater more for people from their home communities.

Mr. James was from the same area of origin within the North West Province and one of his collaborators was a family friend to Pamella's mother.<sup>17</sup> Pamella's mother had heard from people in her quarter that Mr. James had successfully sent people abroad. She wanted the same success that others had had for her own daughter. Mr. James's elegant sense of dressing, his multiple mobile phones and his physically corpulent stature were all sure signs of wealth and status in Cameroon (Rowlands 1994). Given the prior failures of Pamella, trying to fall bush with the help of Mr. James appeared the safest way to attempt to connect the family to bush. Hence, Pamella's parents were willing to try to 'survive' the younger ones with the help of Mr. James.

***Relations between Mr. James and Pamella:  
authority, connections and education***

It is striking that Pamella's parents repeatedly chose to trust Mr. James the migration broker more than they trusted their own daughter. Mr. James only had a secondary school leaving certificate. Pamella had an undergraduate degree in law from a Francophone university. The following analysis of relations between Mr. James and Pamella may contribute to answering this puzzle. I will argue that the symbolic power of even just the semblance of international connections can out-

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<sup>17</sup> Within a larger picture, none of the migration brokers with whom I did in-depth research had a particular specialization in sending people out from within their own ethnic groups. Trust through ethnic networks can be crucial, but in this context needs to be expanded by trust that is grounded in a broker's powers as evident in his connections to bush.

weigh the benefits of education. The sexual economy of departure also influences relations between brokers and aspiring migrant women.

After her studies in Dschang, Pamela looked for work for one year. Then she courageously decided to get started in Douala on her own. She arrived in Douala without money to pay rent and without a paying job. Pamela is bilingual, sociable and energetic. Yet, despite her skills and qualifications, Pamela had been technically unemployed ever since graduation. Paid employment is but a distant dream for large parts of the newly graduated youth in Cameroon. For the last few years, Pamela has had to put up with working 'for free' at a lawyer's firm.<sup>18</sup>

Despite her law degree, Pamela's main financial support came from her sexual entanglements. Two 'sugar daddies' (to whom she referred as 'Pa') took care of the monthly rent and daily upkeep. She complemented her financial means with occasional consultancies from the law firm, innovative trading schemes with scrap metal and small investments into land. She told me she was most discouraged by all potential employers that asked her to have sex with them first: 'Phone calls at 7pm asking you to come to the office!' Unable at the age of 32 to fulfill social expectations in Cameroon, Pamela's strong desire to work money in bush took another turn. 'I have suffered enough', she told me. She now wanted to go to bush.

As mentioned above, Pamela would have preferred her parents to give the money to her to directly look for admission abroad. Yet, her parents preferred to work with Mr. James. Signs that demonstrated his connections to bush (foreign university posters, airline posters and foreign university prospectuses) filled his office.<sup>19</sup> To Pamela's parents, his connections were worth more than their daughter's degree in law. Connections (thus not just to bush) in today's Cameroon are important for employment possibilities. University graduates without connections will struggle to make use of their university degrees. As another informant and friend, Manuella, told me while still in bush: 'I have seen my age mates, they were in university and I would have loved to be in that position. But I thank God, I'm a bushfaller though. [She laughs loud.] I'm a bushfaller though. I'm more than them somehow. I still thank God for that.'

Twelve months after my initial meeting with her parents, Pamela had still not left the country. In the course of many failed lines and empty promises, Pamela had grown increasingly frustrated with Mr. James. Initially she had heard that Mr. James could follow up documents right at the level of the Embassy. She had believed that he had connections at the Embassy. Yet after her parents had deposited the first 500,000 CFA, Mr. James came up with a whole series of programmes (including also to Finland and Cyprus) – all of which failed. Pamela denied his proposal to travel out to Dubai because she believed that she would not be able to build a good life there.

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<sup>18</sup> The firm is run by and dominated by Banyangis (South West Province). Even as an Anglophone in Francophone Douala, Pamela complained to me about internal dynamics at the law firm that tended to exclude and disadvantage her as a North Westerner.

<sup>19</sup> While my association with his office certainly helped his authority in public perception, Mamie Pamela was fully aware of my role as a researcher and not collaborator of Mr. James. Once she asked me to encourage Pamela to go to bush and I gently refused and explained my own reservations, doubts and questions.

On the day, Pamela and I met for the first time, Mr. James announced to me, and then later to both of us, that Pamela was going to travel out within two weeks – namely on the fifteenth of October. To my surprise, Pamela was not fully informed about these new plans. Mr. James was spreading his information in different ways to Pamela and me. He urged us to go out for drinks and happily cheer to the success of Pamela's own bushfalling. As Mr. James proudly toasted to Pamela's success, I realized that Pamela did not believe in her departure at all.

Even though Pamela did not actually know the name of Mr. James's agency, they were both very used to each other. The connection was quite personal and not business-like. Mr. James joked that he would like Pamela to have a child before she goes out to bush. Pamela was not in a relationship with Mr. James. Yet, like most big men, Mr. James liked to flirt and try his powers over women. Mr. James would have liked Pamela to work for his office. Pamela had already refused the small salary that Mr. James was offering his other employees and secretaries.<sup>20</sup> With reference to the fact that Pamela was still childless, Mr. James insinuated that for her to give birth before her departure for bush would ensure Pamela's continuing connection to Cameroon. Mr. James was here posing as a potential 'Pa' (i.e. sugar daddy). Yet, Pamela was not easily intimidated and jokingly ignored and contoured his advances. When Mr. James called her for a meeting after office hours, she refused to come and told him that she was not a toy.

Pamela was educated, self-assured and aware of her privileged relationship with Mr. James. She knew about visa application procedures and flight costs. While Mr. James generally offered his Dubai line for 1,8 million, he was willing to send her to Dubai for only 1.3 million CFA. Although Pamela was much more privileged in her relationship to Mr. James than other clients, it nevertheless remained that Mr. James stayed in control as to where Pamela would go. When he thought he had an opening for Spain, he talked about Spain to her; and when he thought he had an opening in Australia, then he talked about Australia to her. Control over information centrally structures relations between brokers and aspiring migrants.

Again, despite her knowledge and education, Pamela was nevertheless dependent on where Mr. James thought he had his respective openings. Pamela did not feel in a position to tell Mr. James to what country she wanted to go because she wanted to go to the country where he had 'good connections' and a 'good line'. In contrast to any other potential client of Mr. James's office or even his employees, Pamela knew that Mr. James had never travelled out of Cameroon. She proceeded to advise him: 'It is not only sitting here. You have to go out, too.'

Although Mr. James had never travelled abroad, he was publicly recognised as a person of international standing. An acquaintance of mine even shared with me that she believed Mr. James had British nationality. Interestingly, whilst Pamela knew that Mr. James had never travelled, she did not know that, in terms of her education, she was actually better qualified than Mr. James was. Jokingly she called

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<sup>20</sup> Salaries for his employees vary between 1500 to 80,000 CFA. With the presents and donations of a 'Pa' or two, her occasional consultancies and small-scale business activities, Pamela could make more money in Douala.

him 'chief' and insisted on finding out as much as she could about her supposed new line. 'What do you have for me? Let it be a concrete programme.'

Mr. James planned for Pamella to travel to Ukraine with a visa for Ukraine. Through connections of his, he received an Italian residence permit from Italy. With this residence permit, Pamella was supposed to travel onwards from Ukraine to her chosen country of bushfalling within Europe. Mr. James probably preferred Pamella to not fly into Italy directly because Pamella's passport did not - despite her Italian residence permit - hold any Schengen visa stamps. As for Pamella's final country of arrival, Mr. James recommended Norway where he had a contact person. In the beginning, Pamella was willing to do simple household work - just to be able to start somewhere. As Pamella was 'smart', her parents and Mr. James trusted her to figure out issues, such as working permits, along the way.

Mr. James did not fully trust me and occasionally switched to speaking 'kontri talk' with Pamella in my presence.<sup>21</sup> Despite his initial openness and invitation, he believed that all white people were potentially spies. What I learned about the Kiev line was mostly from Pamella who also sought my advice and opinion. Occasional English words came up amidst 'kontri talk'. These words resonate heavily with what bushfalling has come to stand for:

*'... connection... opportunity... success... assurance... confirm... landing... Ukraine no problem... Belgium, Germany, Norway, Sweden... line... document... figures... kontri man... doubt .... Your documents... they don't want to see your visa.'*

Two days before the supposed departure for Kiev, Pamella came to Mr. James's office again. The close family friend ('uncle') who worked at Mr. James's office did not know anything about her supposed departure. Mr. James ran the whole show himself. He had not even given Pamella the needed information. Everything was vague and up in the air. Despite the vagueness of her departure, Mr. James seemed anxious to strengthen his connections with Europe. For instance, he asked me and my friends (that came from Europe to visit during fieldwork) to marry him. He also had called Pamella just the Sunday before her supposed departure jokingly asking whether she would accept to marry him. With hindsight, his half-serious marriage proposals to both me and Pamella made more sense because he probably had never succeeded in sending anyone to Europe and was putting high hopes onto Pamella and the connections she in turn could generate for his business. The need for good relations and new connections is reciprocal.

In their negotiations, Pamella tried to insist on what exactly was included within the fee and for her parents to only pay half of the money before departure. Complaining that he would not be able to generate any profit with this low price, Mr. James told Pamella that he was merely agreeing to the deal so that he could make a good name and win back the trust that he had lost due to the prior delays in departure. Nevertheless, Mr. James later made new financial arrangements with

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<sup>21</sup> Even though Mr. James and Pamella could understand each other speaking the respective languages of their villages, they would not under normal circumstances speak these with each other.

her parents who more easily agreed to Mr. James's position that the line was going to cost 2.5 million CFA.

The fifteenth of October came and passed by. Despite her supposed departure, Pamela had continued to pay house rent and play in the weekly njangi meetings. A substantial amount of her savings was still blocked in some business investment. Amidst all this confusion, Pamela called her parents to instruct them not to transfer the remaining 1.5 million CFA. Mr. James passed through Douala again and wanted to spend the night there. Pamela told me that she sent him back to Buea. Multiple explanations were given for the new delay.<sup>22</sup>

Then unexpectedly, exactly a month after the first promised departure date, the residence permit finally did come through. It was on a Wednesday that Mr. James called Pamela with that news. He wanted her to travel out the Saturday of that same week. Yet, Pamela still needed to unblock her savings from a business of hers, mobilize a 'Pa' of hers to give her money for trading, as well as to buy winter clothing. The Ukraine visa was only a one-month visa. If Pamela had left in one week's time, only two weeks of its validity would have remained. She negotiated with Mr. James to make it the following Tuesday. Even at this point, Pamela was sceptical about Mr. James programme and was still hesitating on whether to go ahead or not. She told Mr. James not to think that the 500,000 CFA that her parents had already given him would push her to accept. All this while, Mr. James claimed that he had already spent two million on her programme.

Yet, what troubled Pamela the most was the materiality of the actual residence permit and Italian ID card that Mr. James showed to her. The residence permit was an A4 sheet of paper that had a photo glued onto it. 'Is it a true genuine permit?', she asked me. The supposed 'residence permit' seemed too simple to Pamela; it could have been produced in Cameroon. So as to prove the quality of the document, Mr. James claimed that I had seen her residence permit, which was not true.<sup>23</sup>

Pamella's parents by contrast were overjoyed. As the 'books' had now come, Pamella's parents were telling her to go and 'walk' (travel) with these books. After all, Mr. James had assured them that he was going to get the best books one can get for their daughter! Hence, Pamella arranged to hand over half of the remaining money on the Saturday before her departure.

Yet, again there was a new delay. Mr. James had lost Pamella's passport. I later found out that a mediator with whom Mr. James works had been attacked on the road from Douala to Buea. Passports with visas inside can be sold for high prices. Despite this mysterious attack, a few passports later turned up again. The recovered passports included the one of Pamella.

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<sup>22</sup> I was told that his partners in Europe posted Pamela's papers not to Cameroon, but to Kenya. Pamela was told that his main agent was attacked in Douala. Neither Pamela, nor I were exactly sure what Mr. James had told Pamela's parents. Mr. James did, however, go for drinks with Pamela's parents.

<sup>23</sup> He had earlier shown me the residence permit that he had been sent for another client of his and I had translated what the document said. Pamela was present on this day and listened with great interest to my translations. Mr. James' reaction told me that he had not before this enquired into the details of the residence permit that he had received through his contact people in Italy.



Due to all the confusions and delays around Pamella's supposed departure, her parents ended up defying their daughter's precautions. They gave the entire two million CFA to Mr. James. As the lines were changing, the trust of Pamella's parents in Mr. James had not diminished. Mr. James had told her father that everything was all right and that he needed the money to prepare Pamella's final departure. I called Pamella a few days before her new departure date, but her number was no longer passing. After many delays, Pamella left secretly a few days earlier. Pamella had finally made it.

In the above description of Pamella and Mr. James, it becomes clear how important the dissemination of information is for the establishment and exercise of authority. Pamella did not have a great degree of control over the outcome of her emigration attempts because Mr. James did not share the details of his lines and programmes with her. It was also striking that Mr. James's performance as a 'big man' and his emphasis on his 'international connections' outweighed Pamella's much higher level of education. As a well-educated woman, she was not in a position to change how her parents related to a migration broker of whom she had grown distrustful for a while.

#### ***Involuntary return: experiencing failure and seeing success***

Pamella had left the country, but when a week later I prepared to visit her parents, I heard surprising news. Pamella had come back! Later Delphine pointed out to me that this was why people did not talk when they prepare to leave the country: 'Things can happen! People can do witchcraft. [...] You might just come back.'

A few weeks later Pamella told me what has happened. Security staff at the Douala airport suspected her because of the Italian residence permit she was carrying. Just a few moments before being picked out, she had been required to declare that she had sufficient financial resources to do business in Ukraine. She was hence in a difficult situation for negotiating with security staff. In the end, she lost a third rather than half of her 900 Euros she had on herself.

Pamella paid 300 Euros to be allowed get on the plane. Yet, her journey never went beyond Kiev airport. As Pamella later told me, Mr. James had not bought the ticket himself. The same agent who had lost the passports of Mr. James's clients in an attack had bought Pamella's flight ticket. The agent had booked a flight for Pamella and another client of Mr. James that brought them into the military airport of Kiev. Together with her travel companion, Pamella was sent back from Kiev to Moscow and then from Moscow to Dubai. In Dubai, their journey came to a momentary halt. There was no flight ticket for them to go to Cameroon. Given that Mr. James sends his clients out to hustle and fall bush, a return ticket is not at all required. His clients want a one-way ticket out of the country.

On the phone, Mr. James first tried to persuade them to allow her to stay in Dubai. He was going to send his 'contact people' to try and 'smuggle' them out of

the airport.<sup>24</sup> Yet, seeing the environment at the airport, Pamela did not think that it was possible. She refused and insisted that Mr. James send them a return ticket back to Cameroon.

Pamella wanted to avoid having the papers passed onto the Cameroonian police. On her way back from Dubai via Nairobi to Douala, Pamella spent the equivalent of a monthly Cameroonian income (70 Euros) to get her Italian residence permit and ID back from the officials. Once back in the possession of these documents, Pamella proceeded to destroy and flush the residence permit down the toilet.<sup>25</sup> 'If not that, I'd still be in New Bell.'

New Bell is an infamously reputed prison in Cameroon. On a purely formal level, there might not be any legal provisions for imprisonment upon deportation. Nevertheless, it is common wisdom that state officials require financial payments to let deported migrants exit the airport. As one of my informants said, only those should try to fall bush that have family members back in Cameroon that can buy you out of prison in case of deportation.

Upon first arriving at the airport, Pamella went straight to Mr. James's house. For fear of shame and to overcome the first shock, Pamella stayed there for a few days before travelling the last few kilometres to her parental village. Pamella was contemptuous of Mr. James. She complained to me that he better start travelling himself before he claims to be in a position to smuggle people out of airports! 'The highest that Mr. James has travelled is Yaoundé.'

Pamella no longer accepted the claim of Mr. James to be an 'expert at travelling' – as he liked to speak of himself. Despite all of the pretensions and efforts of Mr. James, Pamella spitefully said that the work he did for her was fundamentally just 'doki work'. The opening that he had found was not based on real knowledge or on genuinely powerful connections. He merely offered her papers – a residence permit he had been able to buy through the help of other mediators and brokers. Yet, despite her distress, Pamella did not blame Mr. James. She held the president of Cameroon responsible: 'I blame Biya.' Pamella considered conditions in Cameroon to be unbearable: 'Oh Cameroon! I de mess mess man!'<sup>26</sup>

In many ways, Pamella still depended on Mr. James. As she had run out of money, Mr. James gave her 60,000 CFA for travelling. Despite the failure of the Kiev line, Mr. James remained the 'big man' who hands out money to people around him.<sup>27</sup> Mr. James informed Pamella's parents by phone. When Pamella finally went to see her parents, she only stayed for a few hours. She explained the causes of her return to her parents who clearly understood and recognized the mistakes that had been made along the way. Yet, it was important to Pamella's mother to first 'cool down' before going to see Mr. James. What counts the most to her was to see his 'countenance'. His personal attitude seemed more important to her than his actual

24 It is possible that Mr. James had always considered Dubai as a back up in case the Ukraine programme was to fail. It is common practice for migration brokers to send their clients after the failure of one programme to a country that they know they can surely deliver. Otherwise, it would seem surprising that the flight from Douala to Kiev went via Dubai.

25 She kept the Italian ID card as a means of proof against Mr. James.

26 Translation: 'Oh Cameroon! It messes people up!'

27 'Big men', such as for example some wealthy landlords, can also give out money as gifts to their tenants.

professional capacity. She wanted to see how Mr. James 'felt' and what his own 'plans' were. 'It's his business. You must always have a plan.' Although deeply disappointed at Pamella's return, her mother did not charge Mr. James' with having been selfish or failing her daughter.

When Pamella's father finally went to the office, Mr. James' expression of regret about what had happened convinced Pamella's father that there had been no bad intention. Clear arrangements were not made for future steps or alternative lines. Pamella's father told Mr. James that he cannot add more money for another line and Mr. James accepted. He promised to come and visit Pamella's parents at their house. In spite of the rather pompous failure, Pamella's parents proceeded to wait for the next steps of Mr. James.

After her husband's meeting with Mr. James, Mamie Pamella explained to me that 'nobody knew beforehand [that this would happen]'.<sup>28</sup> She compared Mr. James's office to a camera. After all, she told me, the people who went during the time we had first met had all succeeded. Before you develop the film, you do not know what is really inside. The horizon of expectation vis-à-vis a migration broker always included the possibility of failure. A roll of film alone does not give an indication of its photos. Before the development and printing in the dark room, one does not know what kind of photos will emerge or even whether any will appear.

Striking in the aftermath of Pamella's return is that daughter and parents communicated relatively little about the past event. Contrary to expectations, they did not form a united front against Mr. James. Mr. James succeeded in quickly aligning Pamella's parents with him. Yet, Pamella and her parents did not meet again to discuss what they would like to do about the current situation. After her initial visit at her parents' place, Pamella went to Douala where she also spent Christmas and New Year's Eve. Although she herself had seen Mr. James in the meantime, it is only through me that Pamella learnt early in January that her father had gone to see Mr. James, too.<sup>29</sup>

In the middle of January, Mamie Pamella went to Mr. James herself. Before her visit, she told me that Mr. James should just return the money 'if the thing [was] above him.' Yet, Mr James showed her documents and papers and talked. He said to her that Pamella's passport had been sent to government people in Europe. She was supposed to fly out again on 28 January. Mr. James spoke to Pamella about his contact person from Ukraine who would come personally to Cameroon to take her there. When Pamella made personal enquiries with the sub-broker with whom Mr. James worked at the airport, she found out that the Ukraine man had long left the country again. As Pamella complained, he had the 'power of the talk'. He is telling 'sweet stories'.

Another promised departure day came and passed. Pamella confided with me that she suspected that his middlemen were using him. So as not to embarrass Mr.

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28 Original: 'No man no bi know.'

29 Mamie Pamella felt very concerned for Pamella. She felt that she needed to give time to her daughter to overcome the shock. 'She should rest. She is a small child. She can't have my own heart.' She asked me for advice and I suggested that it might be good to have closer communication between family members so as to be able to push better for demands with Mr. James.

James any further, I avoided discussing Pamela's return directly with him. When we eventually did discuss Pamela's return, he told me that a big man does not give up easily. Whatever happens, he would learn and then continue. He told Pamela that he was going to try again to bring her to Ukraine. However, in Pamela's passport, there now is a stamp over her Ukrainian visa. While I managed to decipher the Cyrillic script with the help of some very rudimentary memories of the Russian alphabet, I guessed that immigration officials 'cancel' visas when they deny entry to a person. Mr. James, however, had told Pamela that her passport did not carry a prejudice against her.

Seeing his continued empty promises for supposed departure dates were not credible, Mr. James changed his approach and suggested starting a police enquiry against one of the mediators who had helped him to run the line to Kiev. He said that he wanted to pay back parts of the money that Pamela's parents had given him, but did not have this money at his disposal. He argued that the Italian residence permit alone had cost him 800,000 CFA. Pamela knew that it would take a minimum of two years to take Mr. James to court to reclaim the money. Given that they are all from the same village, Pamela's parents were also pressing for non-confrontational solutions to the problem. As Mr. James promised to eventually return the money, he was winning time.

Pamela's parents had moved their household back to the North West Province. Pamela's parents did not experience Mr. James' prior delays in quite the same way as Pamela (or for that matter I) did. Pamela's parents could not so easily understand or measure the details of his lines, the various kinds of papers that could be produced by brokers, even the scale of wealth between various countries in bush. While Pamela grew increasingly sceptical during the long months during which she was supposed to go out with Mr. James, her parents did not necessarily see any of these delays as a sign of his potential lack of competence in the matter. After all, bushfalling is inherently dangerous and incomprehensible - hence the need for support of a broker. Money buys the connection that is indispensable to be able to make it abroad.

The way in which Pamela and her parents understood prior failures differed. Mamie Pamela told me that the initial/first line to Cyprus had failed because the broker in question had not been straight. This explains the stress that she put on seeing the countenance of Mr. James upon her daughter's return from Ukraine. The Embassy's denial of a visa was Mamie Pamela explanation for the failure of her daughter's second attempt to go to Cyprus. Who knows whether Pamela would have been granted the visa had it not been for the broker who prepared the application. What can be concluded from this case, is that doki line failures and visa denial failures due to stringent rules at the level of the Embassy cannot be distinguished from one another from the standpoint of somebody like Pamela's mother or even Pamela herself.

Even though Pamela's mother had travelled to Germany once through her church, she did not distinguish between countries in bush where Mr. James had been sending his clients. Mr. James is considered successful because his clients are now all in *white man kontri*. The language of bushfalling and bush make for

a flat geography of migration. Yet, given my research with this broker, I know that the vast majority of his clients were actually leading their bushfailing lives in Dubai – not in Europe. Pamella's 'line' was fundamentally different from his previous lines.

Mamie Pamella does know that others have been right in their perseverance in falling bush. 'People are going.' 'This is my own bad luck? Or it's his own luck?' Mamie Pamella told me about a person in her quarter who had just recently succeeded in going. This success case proved to her that it is right to persevere in the pursuit of travelling plans. She 'sees' success and interprets her own failure as 'bad luck'.

While I do not know about the details of this specific person, I did do research with another informant who used to live in the same quarter as Mamie Pamella. Martina, too, gave her money to Mr. James and she was successful. Her 'line' to white man kontri took her to Dubai. Martina and her husband (to whom she is the second wife) lost money three times in different bushfailing attempts with various brokers and mediators. When I met Martina for the first time in the office of Mr. James, Mr. James was calling her husband and trying to persuade him to give money for a fourth attempt. Friends of Mamie Pamella know about Martina's family. They know that she is now in 'bush'. They know that she has sent money for Christmas!

Yet, hurdles had marked even Martina's final journey to Dubai.<sup>30</sup> Because of bad documentation, Martina was first detained at Dubai airport for about a week before Mr. James finally managed to process a correct visa for Martina. At first, it was difficult for Martina to find work in Dubai. Hospitals were not recognizing her nursing diploma. All this while, her accommodation and visa renewals needed to be paid for. Martina survived in Dubai because her husband repeatedly sent money to her (at least another 1.3 million CFA).<sup>31</sup> However, this fact hardly anybody knew about. What got people talking were the Christmas presents. Yet, the glory of her current success proved her resilience in pursuing bush right. Martina's husband was thankful to Mr. James for having succeeded in sending his wife out. To have another family member out in bush is a source of pride and status for him. Martina is a success – whatever the sacrifices that she or her husband made on the way!

Astonishingly enough, even Pamella's deportation was taken calmly and did not fundamentally destroy their relations of trust. The failure of Pamella to actually go and remain in Ukraine was managed by Mr. James and her parents according to a set of rules and norms that were more rooted in social norms of Cameroonian society than in formalistically understood 'rights' and 'obligations' of a economic business agreement. Mr. James needs trust, as well as a good reputation to be able

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<sup>30</sup> I sincerely thank Michaela Pelican for her great team spirit in collaborating together with me in our respective research projects on the migration trajectory of Martina in both Cameroon and Dubai.

<sup>31</sup> This is the equivalent of roughly 2,000 Euros. The woman who travelled out to Dubai on the same day with Martina had nobody who could send her money from Cameroon to survive. As a primary school teacher, she avoided repatriation from Dubai by signing a work contract with a security company for three years, which had extremely tedious working conditions and bad pay. As she needed to avoid repatriation to Cameroon at all cost, her visa regulations put her into a position in which she had no possibility of cancelling her three-year work contract.

to continue to attract clients. It is clearly in his interest to be reconciliatory and to make good future promises about sending Pamela out through another line or about giving back the money. He was playing for time and projecting solutions into the future.

Given that Mr. James genuinely tried to send Pamela out, they were disappointed, but not angry with Mr. James. The real limit of trust in migration brokers rests with selfishness. Mr. James has proven to be incapable of living up to his promises, yet, none of his behaviour pointed at selfishness. The ways in which money was transferred to brokers were evaluated heavily depend on levels and types of expectations of migration brokers. After all of Pamela's bad experiences with Mr. James's bushfalling lines, Pamela's younger sister still seemed to have maintained a level of trust and admiration for Mr. James. She dated him and then became pregnant. Even if most 'lines' are for both men and women, relations between aspiring migrant women and brokers need to be understood also in relation to courtship practices and gender relations in Cameroon.

Secrecy also worked in favour of Mr. James. Pamela's mother and father have no interest to talk about the embarrassment of a failed emigration attempt. Their bushfalling attempt needed to be kept secret so that future attempts would not be put at risk. The harmonious nature of relations was the way in which Mr. James and Pamela's parents could deal with failure. Having said that, other alternative paths of action, such as a court trial against Mr. James, would not be possible either. Court trials take a long time, and brokers would be in a good position to influence the outcome of the decision on their own behalf.

In the above case study, I have analysed underlying reasons that motivated Pamela's parents to entrust money with the hands of Mr. James. This section of the chapter proposed that the very notion of risk in relation to monetary transfers needs to be contextualised into the life worlds of not just Pamela's existence in Douala, but also of her younger brothers and sisters. In seeking to explain the choice of Pamela's parents to entrust money with Mr. James, this section has also elaborated on the ways in which causes of failure remain largely invisible until the failure has already occurred. Pamela's mother gave money to Mr. James because she needed to in order to discover whether Mr. James could deliver and bring success.

### **Victoria's brother goes to China: trading transformative potentials**

From the above description arises the question as to how and whether relations between aspiring migrants and migration brokers change during moments of crisis. Through the next case study of Victoria's brother, I will analyse dynamics of normative regulation beyond the framework of the law. I will argue that regardless of his actual capacities as a migration broker, Mr. Walter sells the potential to

transform an ordinary family into a bushfaller family. As a big man, Mr. Walter can (against remuneration) elevate others to the status of bushfallers. The legitimacy of the work of migration brokers is connected to this dispersal of powers and potential bestowment of status.

Victoria was one of the brightest and most educated within her family. Her cousins ended their education at the level of GCE – the equivalent of the former O-level exam in Great Britain. She by contrast had started a degree course at the university and then did a year of accountancy training. Because of her special position within the family, it was apparently always clear to her that one day she would go to bush. 'As you are just leaving school, you really only want to travel abroad.'<sup>32</sup> Mr. Walter's wife was a good friend of hers from both school and Church. Victoria lobbied her (paternal) uncle who happily agreed to finance her bushfalling project. Her uncle (the brother of her father) was a North Westerner who came down to make his fortune with cocoa farming in the South West Province. Victoria herself was born in the South West Province. As her parents were dead, her uncle was in charge of her. He handed over 1.3 million CFA to Mr. Walter in 2005, but things went wrong. Victoria was never able to go because – as Mr. Walter explained – he had had to spend her money on another purpose. He explained to Victoria that a client of his had attempted to rape a secretary in China and he had needed all his money to buy this client out of prison in China. Now there was no more money for him to send Victoria to China.

Victoria struggled without success to get her money back. Victoria tells me how 2005 had been a bad year for Mr. Walter. After a series of failed migration programmes, he had had to go into hiding. He first went to Yaoundé and later disappeared to China. Even his wife with their three children and the secretary Delma had to move elsewhere for a while until matters calmed down. His church, the Christian Missionary Fellowship International, temporarily expelled him from membership. Delma explained that they did not like the way he was doing his business. Too many bribes, too much 'ton ton'<sup>33</sup> and other members of Church had unsuccessfully opened files with him for bushfalling.<sup>34</sup>

Victoria decided that she could not just sit and wait for Mr. Walter to arrange things. In retrospectively explaining to me how she dealt with this disappointment, Victoria told me that 'to be a complete woman, you have to marry and give birth.' After her failure to leave the country, Victoria instead married a North Westerner and gave birth. Once married, Victoria explained, you could not leave for bush again.<sup>35</sup> Victoria's paternal uncle was angry with Victoria for the failed bushfalling attempts. He had been able to raise the money through his work on the cocoa

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32 Original: 'As man de komot school, i dey hot for fall bush.'

33 'Ton ton' is Pidgin and stands for indirect dealings and evasive manners.

34 Apparently, most of the other people from her Church had opened files with Mr. Walter in 2005 and had I been able to leave the country. Victoria notably talked about a friend of hers who went to Belgium. One success can overshadow many failures.

35 At the time I met Victoria in Buea, she was just starting a course at the teacher training college. She was no longer motivated to go to bush. 'My time has passed. I am on a different level now.'

farm.<sup>36</sup> As Victoria explained how her uncle raised the money, she puts her hands on her forefront to show the sweat that it took to work this money in the bush.<sup>37</sup>

Victoria's uncle accused her of having 'eaten the money' herself (Bayart 2009). Victoria fell severely ill for eight months and she strongly suspects her uncle to be at the root of her illness. He must have bewitched her out of his discontent over the failed bushfelling project. After Victoria's marriage, her husband took it upon himself to pay back the debt to Victoria's uncle. Three years after the initial failure to leave the country, her husband had already managed to pay back 650,000 CFA. As times became financially difficult, he sent his wife back to Mr. Walter to try to get the money back from him. It was during these days that I first met Victoria in the office of Mr. Walter.

In their conversation, Mr. Walter reiterated that he did not have the money to be able to reimburse Victoria. My research assistant Delphine believed his narrative. Over time, Victoria had grown very sceptical of Mr. Walter's doings, yet, fundamentally still considered him not a feyman, but as a businessman in his own trade – a trade beyond comprehension. In a conciliatory voice, Mr. Walter offered that, if Victoria could bring him another client, he would be able to deduct money from that fee to give back to her. Victoria was not satisfied with this offer. She did not know anybody in her family or amongst her friends who wanted to go out. A few weeks later, her small brother had decided that he would like to go to bush. It is her only brother and hence the 'chop chair' of the family.<sup>38</sup> He will have responsibilities within the family and if he were to become a bushfeller, this would certainly be beneficial for the entire family.

The family of origin is responsible for the bushfelling project of Victoria's brother. Yet, Victoria's husband had already reimbursed Victoria's uncle after their marriage for the money that the uncle had spent on Victoria's failed emigration project. Consequently, Victoria's paternal uncle now had to give back the money that Victoria's husband had already reimbursed to him. 'Let the uncle be fully responsible', Victoria reasoned. Thus, Victoria's uncle returned 650,000 CFA to her husband.

As Victoria came back to Mr. Walter's office to announce that her brother was now willing to fall bush in her place, Victoria did not find Mr. Walter in his office. She tried to call him by phone, but none of his three numbers passed 'Is this place really functioning?' Victoria pointed her head at the office. The door to the simple office was small. The surroundings were dirty. Some people were taking computer classes in the front room. Although the office was always populated, it was difficult to ever see anybody really working there. In the absence of Mr. Walter, Victoria confided her worries to one of the employees. Johnson answers positively. 'Yes', the office functions, 'the only problem is with the customers.' Victoria asks whether there are not enough customers. Johnson answered that customer come, but do not always apply. His position appeared curious. Johnson vouched for the reliabil-

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<sup>36</sup> Since about 2000, cocoa sells quite well and those farmers do according to Cameroonians standards quite well. A plantation like Victoria's uncle can generate in one year almost 3,000,000 CFA.

<sup>37</sup> Here bush refers to farming the hinterlands.

<sup>38</sup> In the case of the death of the head of family, the 'chop chair' will become the new head of family.



ity of the work of Mr. Walter's office, but did not talk as if he himself was actually involved in carrying out the work. Even Victoria approached him almost as an external observer, rather than one of the people responsible for the operations.

When Victoria gave her money to Mr. Walter, his agency was called 'Global Web Enterprise'. As Victoria narrated this to me, she turned around and tried to read the name on the poster next to the entrance of the small office in front of which we are sitting. This is the first time she has bothered to look at the poster and decipher the name. She did not particularly care for the agency or institution. She knew that she was dealing with Mr. Walter. She was disillusioned with him, his lies, and his ways. Yet, she did not see another way of going about bushfalling. 'How does one do if you don't go with these kind of people?' She was interested to know whether Mr. Walter was establishing contacts with me to be able to send people out. When night came, Mr. Walter had still not made an appearance at the office.

A week later, Victoria's brother Matthias –the now aspiring bushfaller – travelled down from his uncle's house to Buea. They caught Mr. Walter just a few minutes before he wanted to set off to Limbe. Invoking his powers, Mr. Walter promised 'to perform'. He prided himself to have been given the 'power of attorney' in Malaysia.<sup>39</sup> He proudly showed us the certificate. Within the same breath, he pointed to the photo of himself and the Chinese Ambassador in the room. 'The Ambassador recognizes us.'<sup>40</sup>

Having established his powers, Mr. Walter addressed Matthias: 'You want to hustle, study...? Tell me what you want today.' When Matthias explained that his uncle would like him to go to the U.S., Mr. Walter named the prices of his lines for Europe. Upon hearing the fee, Victoria cut the conversation short: 'This is beyond me.'<sup>41</sup> She did not have the financial power to reach to that level and mobilise more money for bush. Mr. Walter hence proceeded to promote China as a destination for bushfalling. If you have money, he explained to Matthias, you can do business there. He spoke of possibilities to buy goods from factories, to act as a commissioner, to join in operations with other Cameroonians, to act as an interpreter or to teach English. He also mentioned medicine courses in English. Mr. Walter even told us that his junior brother preferred China to Europe. As usual, Mr. Walter offered information on salary levels in China and potential profit margins. He dropped numbers and conversion rates at an incredible speed. 'I will start to perform'<sup>42</sup>, Mr. Walter concludes and goes on to talk a few words of Chinese.

Convinced by Mr. Walter's talk, Matthias decided that he wanted to go to China to hustle there for one year and then use one of Mr. Walter's contact universities for medical studies. 'My own level end[s] for visa and ticket. But since we know [each other]... I will help you with everything.' Tuition fees are one million CFA.

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39 This means that he has been commissioned as a mediator by a university in Malaysia to recruit students for them in Cameroon.

40 I was not there when this photo was taken, but judging from the photo, I see no reason to put into question the authenticity of this photographic evidence of the personal connections between Mr. Walter and diplomatic staff at the Chinese embassy in Yaoundé.

41 Original: 'My hand no reach for dey.'

42 Original: 'I go start perform.'

Victoria calculated that this would require Matthias to have to save 100,000 CFA every month. Mr. Walter assured that this would be no problem – unless of course Matthias started to fall for and ‘perform’ with Chinese women. Matthias’s A-level results in the natural sciences were not a subject of discussion. Victoria hesitated and asked Mr. Walter the difficulty or ease of things would be for Matthias in China. Mr. Walter responded that he could not ‘perform’ in his place. ‘I can only give you a channel to go. You have to be smart.’

The way Mr. Walter put matters, any failure would be Matthias’s responsibility and not the consequence of the kind of visa he had, the job market there and his own qualifications and connections. Mr. Walter managed affairs in such a way that many of his services were given out of kindness, but not as part of the actual agreement with his clients. Money negotiations are played according to Mr. Walter’s tune.<sup>43</sup>

When Victoria wanted to leave the office, Mr. Walter asked her to ‘perform’. Victoria did not understand, yet, Matthias did. He took out 500,000 CFA and handed it over to his elder sister. His uncle had given him the money. Victoria was not aware that Matthias had this money on him, nor that her uncle had apparently already seen Mr. Walter in between. Mr. Walter did his calculations. He introduced a 25 percent reduction of the initial payment of 1.3 million CFA three years ago because he argued that ‘Victoria had not shown up for travel’ and then for the transfer of name.

Mr. Walter took Victoria by surprise when informing her that the 25 percent cut was an integral part of their standard contracts: ‘We get standard contracts. These are the rules. I can bring you those.’ It is not clear whether Victoria ever signed such a ‘standard contract’. The 25 percent reduction boiled down to a loss of money of 325,000 CFA. He calculated that he already had a payment of 985,000 CFA. The new China line cost 1.8 million CFA, which left 815,000 CFA still to be paid. He claimed that the uncle had already agreed to all of this: ‘I cannot cheat you by one Francs.’

Victoria held the money Matthias gave her and hesitated: ‘Money that I will give you the second time?’ Mr. Walter kept stressing how very fast Matthias could be leaving and she ended up handing over the money. The secretary Delma took the 500,000 CFA and the other employee Johnson took Matthias’s passport. Victoria told Mr. Walter again how very nearly she had died the last time she had given him money. Delma’s reaction to this was to stress that she ought to be glad that Mr. Walter was even recognising the money that she had deposited with him in 2005: ‘Are you not grateful that he recognises you?’<sup>44</sup>

As soon as Victoria handed over the money, Mr. Walter began calling Matthias ‘boss’. Having now officially signed up for bushfalling, he advanced to the status of a real ‘man’. Matthias had a series of questions for Mr. Walter. As he got out an

43 As Victoria did not have an idea about the prices for which other brokers currently offer their lines, she asked whether the flight would be included in the 1.8 million that the China line costs. She also mentioned that her uncle had wanted to know whether food would be included. Mr. Walter answered that the flight was included, yet the food not. ‘The realities there are your own responsibility. Once you’re there in the plane, finances are finished.’

44 Original: ‘*You no dye glad se I de recognise you?*’

empty form for a curriculum vita that he did not know how to complete, Mr. Walter responded: 'I'm seeing a successful future businessman in front of me.'

By now, Victoria seemed more convinced of Mr. Walter's powers and complimented Mr. Walter for speaking with confidence. Mr. Walter replied: 'I speak with confidence because I am a powerful personality [big boy]. I declare and I act upon my words.'<sup>45</sup> As Victoria set of to leave, she asked him to dash her money. He stated that he never really carried money on himself because if he did, he would immediately spend the money. Just to fuel the car would cost him 50,000 CFA, he boasted. Victoria was impressed. 'I cannot know this.'<sup>46</sup> They are on different levels. She has never driven a car. Complimenting Mr. Walter, Victoria told him that people were saying that he was rich. Mr. Walter was pleased to hear this and laughed. He searched his pocket and finally found two 1,000 CFA notes. He handed them over to Victoria who thanked him.

Symbolically, Victoria and Mr. Walter have turned the pages of past disputes. She has forgiven him past frustrations. By 'dashing' her a monetary gift of 2,000 CFA, he symbolically accepted his role of protector and patron. His symbolic gift proved his generosity and goodwill (Daloz 2005: 168). Mr. Walter is a big and powerful man who will do his best to look after his dependents – of which Victoria's family has once again become.

He also helped out when it turned out that the uncle was reluctant to mobilise yet more money for Matthias's start capital in China. He agreed to print out a statement on his NGO paper specifying that one million CFA were necessary for Matthias's accommodation and further bills upon arrival in China. With this paper in hand, Matthias was able to convince his uncle to give out another one million CFA. Seeing my surprise, Victoria explained, 'This is Africa. If you merely tell him, he will not give it to you.'<sup>47</sup> He would have been afraid of being duped once more, as Victoria's uncle cannot read and write. Therefore, he had to ask somebody else to read and verify whether the paper was correct. With this pretence document [in Pidgin 'lie lie document'], Victoria says it was easy to get the money from 'Pa'.

A few days later, the visa was indeed out. The remaining 315,000 CFA were handed over at the airport. A whole support group of about 35 family members came with Matthias to the airport to see him off. After his departure, neither Victoria nor her uncle had any news for a very long time. Finally, at the end of January, I received a text message that ran the following way:

*'Hello jill, How are you? Please don't be angry y I ha'nt cal sins I ariv. things ar stil very hard. Presently de ar celabr Chinese new yr til febr endingso no job til then. My no is (0086) 87450286754. Lots of luv. Matthias, Victoria's brother'*<sup>48</sup>

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45 Original: 'I talk with confidence because I be big boy. I declare and I act.'

46 Original: 'I no fit know.'

47 Original: 'If you tell i for your mop, I no go give you.'

48 For purposes of privacy, this is not the original telephone number of my informant. The writing, however, was left unchanged.

Mr. Walter never delivered any of the help and support he had initially so very generously promised. Yet, this was largely beyond vision to others. For most, Matthias had gone out and was a bushfaller now. The speed of Mr. Walter's action had proven his power. It was now up to Matthias to also 'perform' and earn money.

Although Mr. Walter failed to send out Victoria, he did a few years later send out her brother. The family now finally had become a bushfaller family. Through this case study, I traced how relations between aspiring migrants and migration brokers are structurally embedded and regulated through normative frameworks outside and beyond the law. While Mr. Walter first failed Victoria, he did not turn out to be a feyman. He recognised her and through this proved his status as a big man. Through his final act, Mr. Walter proved his capacity to transform Victoria's family into a bushfaller family. The symbolic value of this transformation needs to be taken seriously in an analysis of relations between migration brokers and aspiring migrants.

As patrons, migration brokers sell not the good of going out, but the potential for the aspiring migrant to become a bushfaller. One can only turn another person into a bushfaller, if oneself is such a person of power and status. A person who can pretend to be able to bring somebody else to bush is a 'big man'. Big men, and by extension in my analysis, migration brokers, are according to Daloz social elevators (2002; 2005). They trade with the transformative potential of their clients. Migration brokers distribute resources and their work is hence seen as legitimate.

Just as crime is an insufficient mode of analysis for migration brokerage (Kyle & Liang 2001), relation between clients and brokers do not confer to ideal types of contractual business deals either. I have argued and sought to demonstrate that brokerage relations imply that the broker, with his superior powers and levels of connection, promises to protect and further the cause of his protégée. The broker promises to open up his own connections for the success of his applicants and protégées at the level of bush. The gracious 'help' discourse of both brokers is not just marketing strategy, but a lived and accepted reality of clients.

Mr. Walter 'dashed' 2,000 CFA as a symbolic sign that he was accepting his responsibility for her and her brother. With the handing over of the money, the broker agrees to use his connections for the benefit (and mobility) of the respective 'applicants'. When Victoria hesitated whether to trust Mr. Walter a second time with money, Mr. Walter's secretary stressed that Victoria ought to be grateful that the boss 'recognised' her at all. The secretary did not talk about recognition of prior payments, but of recognition of Victoria as a protégée who wanted to gain access to bush.

We have thus seen that brokerage relations are not to be summed up by a contractual exchange of services against money. Aspiring migrants receive the favours of a person in authority to whom she and her family are bound in manifold ways. The norms that govern family and community affairs also govern these interactions.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to provide a migrant-centred analysis of relations between migration brokers and aspiring migrants that does not foreclose conclusions by directly equating legality with legitimacy. In the first case study, a migration broker accompanied one of his clients to the airport in Douala. In this case, I have argued that the deeds and actions of migration brokers need to be analysed in relation to the expectations and norms that aspiring migrants and their family members hold and evaluate the authority and capacity of a migration broker. Expectations vis-à-vis migration brokers are formed in relation to the lived experience in a place of departure. From this perspective, migration brokers are important regulatory authorities.

The second case study of this chapter took an in-depth look at financial rationalities within the family of an aspiring migrant woman called Pamela. Her parents entrusted money with the migration broker Mr. James because alternative investments in Cameroon seemed even riskier. The case study of Pamela taught us that trust in migration brokers can only be explained if it is grounded in the moral economy of departure in Cameroon where crisis has become routinised (Mbembe & Roitman 1995) and failure to go out is the starting position of most aspiring migrant.

The third case study underscored that the transformative potential of a migration broker can still be realised even many years after a first failed attempt and even for another member of family. Mr. Walter recognised his financial debt towards Victoria a few years after the initial payment and agreed to send her brother to China. This case study showed us that relations between migration brokers and aspiring migrants need to be analysed over a longer time span than the emigration attempt of only one individual.

Together these three sections have illustrated that money transfers from aspiring migrants to migration brokers need to be understood in a context in which brokers are not perceived as just commercial entrepreneurs, but also as well respected patrons, authority figures and 'agents of benevolence, goodwill and equity' (Simon 2009: 198). Bush is a sphere to which only powerful people can gain access. The authority of migration brokers stands for and reflects hopes for global belonging (Ferguson 2006: 174-175) and ambitions for success and status. Migration is a drive to enter into a relationship with the international 'level'. This advancement to a 'higher level' requires the patronage of a person from bush, somebody in bush or a broker.

Within a symbolic economy in which possibilities for migration are understood as lines and as openings, aspiring migrants considered the potential failure of a migration broker in relation to the failure of embassies to give out visas. From the perspective of a society of departure, failed emigration trajectories with brokers are similar to the ones without brokers. As a consequence, migration brokers are not 'other' to aspiring migrants, but rather 'allies' and 'helpers' in a quest for both geographic and social mobility. The failure of a migration broker is also the

failure of the aspiring migrant. Without the broker, he or she would not even have had the chance or hope of being able to go out. Consequently, migratory risks are not located with migration brokers. Aspiring migrants are aware that some migration brokers can use and mislead their clients. Yet, migration brokers are not at all considered an obstacle to safe migration. Instead, migration brokers open up great opportunities and chances that are otherwise not available.

When taking the typology of *dokimen*, *feymen* and *big man* as a starting point for an analysis of migration-related risks, the location of risk in relation to migration changes. Within the consciousness of the aspiring migrants, 'programmes', 'lines' and 'openings' are evaluated according to price, speed and safety. While a family might harbour doubts as to whether or not a migration broker could potentially turn out to be a *feyman*, the respective risk of handing over money to this broker is evaluated in terms of the social status of the broker and the potential power of the papers that he will deliver for travelling.

The migration broker is not blamed for the failure of an emigration as long as the willingness of a broker to facilitate emigration is not in question. Even in the face of failure, Mr. James and Mr. Walter were not considered *feymen* because they genuinely 'tried' to deliver the visas and make the people travel. Given the importance of intentions, one can conclude on a slightly different linguistic register that migration brokers are considered to have an obligation to deliver the 'means' of migration, but not the 'ends'. During transfers of money, migration brokers take upon themselves the obligation to put means of emigration at the disposal of their clients. The ultimate goal of *bush* should thus become possible, but not certain. This nuance in migratory expectations explains why handing over money to migration brokers is a chance and not a risk.

Aspiring migrants entrust migration brokers with money because other means of emigration are rare and not considered as fundamentally different from emigration trajectories without migration brokers. Once money is handed over to migration brokers, migration brokers are under pressure to try to send out their clients. Brokers are not mere businessmen engaged in the facilitation of emigration. They are also members of a community within which they operate. This aspect sets out frameworks that regulate relations at moments of crisis.<sup>49</sup> Brokers who do not put their means at the disposal of aspiring migrants will be shamed as '*feymen*'. Migration brokers whose means are merely based on the imitation of papers will be devalued as '*dokimen*'. Migration brokers whose connections for once fail will be able to upkeep their status as '*big men*' if they have past success cases to show for.

I believe that the above case studies have helped to contribute towards an understanding of third-party mediated migration beyond the dichotomy of 'perpetrator' and 'victim' (Spener 2009: 162-200; Zheng 2010: 2-3). In view of future research on migration brokers and human smuggling, my research demonstrates the need for more micro-level attention to individual, as well family and community-wide relationship between migration brokers and clients. An analysis of migration

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49 For an analysis of how patrons are also under pressure to live up to the expectations of their clients, see Smith 2007:13.

brokers in terms of a potential (future) classification as either legal or illegal misses a vital dimension within emigration trajectories, i.e. the nature of the personal relations between brokers and aspiring migrants. These dynamics are always necessarily geographically located and thus culturally specific. Yet, a mere analysis of relations between migration brokers and aspiring migrants in terms of patronage would not be able to account for the wider structural and legal context that pushes aspiring migrants to seek out migration through the services of migration brokers. In my chapter, I have sought to analyse the agency of aspiring migrants in relation to migration brokers in a wider structural context of dynamics of departure.

Discussions of trafficking and smuggling explain migrants' vulnerability and dependence vis-à-vis brokers in terms of the profit that migration brokers generate (for a critique see Spener 2009: 208-213; Andrijasevic 2010). While the brokers of this study certainly also managed to generate a profit, I have argued that the language of market relations does not do justice to broker migrant relations. Seeking to go beyond an analysis of relations between aspiring migrants and brokers in terms of either mere profit or patronage, it has emerged in this chapter that migration brokerage needs to be considered in terms of the sources and limits of trust.<sup>50</sup>

According to Möllering, trust is the basis for individual risk-taking behaviour or cooperation. Trust according to him is a mental process that covers expectations, the interpretation of a social reality and the suspension of doubt (Möllering 2001: 412-415). Migration is framed as risk in much public and academic discussion. This framework emphasises the momentary suspension of doubt within trust. Yet, as Möllering allows us to understand, interpretations of social realities and expectations are equally important to explain why aspiring migrants trust and enter into relationships with migration brokers.<sup>51</sup>

This chapter has demonstrated that the relationship between migration brokers and aspiring migrants need to be understood in relation to other regulatory authorities and the ways in which aspiring migrants experience these. From the perspective of aspiring migrants, trust in migration brokers is not related to the respective legality of the brokerage service in question. The legitimacy or legality of a visa is not questionable simply because a broker was involved. In fact, from the perspective of an aspiring bushfaller, many times the migration broker gives out the visas. From this perspective, the warnings of the U.S. embassy with which I opened this chapter are simply not relevant for aspiring migrants.

Having in this chapter explained how and why aspiring migrants and their families relate to migration brokers, in the following chapter I will analyse the emergence of migration brokers in Buea and their connections to instances of stateness. As there are limits to trust between migration brokers and aspiring migrants, I will explore what these limits of credibility are.

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<sup>50</sup> Trust can be understood as a 'state of favourable expectations regarding other people's actions and intentions' (Möllering 2001: 404).

<sup>51</sup> Spener, for example, argues that 'the generalized situation of structural violence that constitutes [the] lived experiences [of migrants] can prepare migrants to 'pardon' all but the most egregious abuses committed against them by their coyotes (2009: 227).'

## The rise and fall of migration brokers: The limits of credibility beyond the law



6. Advertisement for a migration broker

‘Good news! Good news! Good news!’ says one of the main advertisement posters of INACOD entitled. INACOD stands for ‘International Assistance for Community Development.’ The poster of INACOD announces its new ‘international work study programmes’ for the year 2008/09. As an organisation, INACOD promises the following services: ‘admission and scholarships into foreign universities’, ‘foreign jobs’, ‘students’ orientation and career counselling’, ‘information about opportunities’ and ‘travelling assistance’. When I first met Mr. James, who runs the office of INACOD, he explained that his work catered for needs in ‘development and education.’ His intention was to send people ‘out’ for study programmes abroad, as well as for work placements. In addition to this, he applied for international grants for development projects and offered ‘career advice’ at schools. This career advice consisted of giving out information about some professional training schools in the country with which he had formed partnerships, as well as about his own services of being able to send people ‘out’.

Mr. James also disseminates advice on travelling and advertisements for his organisation over the radio. At the beginning of my fieldwork period in September 2007, he regularly came to speak during a talk show on a local radio station housed just next



to his office. In response to the questions of the local journalist on the downsides and risks of bushfalling, Mr. James replied:

*This is not the first time that we are hearing that people are being duped. People have always been duped and will continue to be duped. Not until when they are well informed. Not until the government steps in to ensure that this organization [...] should be carrying out their activities in the interest of the community. Because what INACOD does is not for the interest of INACOD, but for the interest of the community. The community needs to be well informed about realities of life. [...] You want to travel to Italy. Ok, we will follow up for you to get the visa for you to travel to Italy. What do you want to go and do in Italy? What's your intention of travelling? You want to go for work? For studies? Or for business? We know it and we counsel you. [...] So we try to get the best for our Cameroonian people. And we are represented in most of these countries.*

In these radio shows, Mr. James presented himself as an expert on travelling and as one who could offer protection from the dangers of duping. Travelling, studying and job placements abroad are all beneficial for young people in Cameroon. As such, Mr. James positioned himself as working in the interest of either the 'community' or the 'Cameroonian people'. Mr. James had a vision and that vision was to 'make globalization a reality'. In his discourse, Mr. James made strong connections between travelling, community development and globalisation.

On a somewhat different discursive level, Mr. James also explicitly positioned himself as contributing to a fight against so called illegal migration. On Labour Day on the 1st of May, the staff of INACOD participated in a demonstration carrying signs with the INACOD emblem and reading 'stop clandestine migration'. Not wanting to question his authority as a migration broker, I never asked Mr. James about his motivations for this action. Regardless of whether he considered the migration trajectories of his own clients to be legal, I silently took the signboards against clandestine migration as an advertisement granting further legitimacy of his work.

The office of the second migration broker, Mr. Walter, was located just a five minute walk from the entrance to the university campus. Just off the main road of Buea was a big colourful poster on the side of the street that showed an airplane entitled 'dream-lifter', which carried clients to clean and shiny airports abroad. A skyscraper landscape spoke of the promises of another world. The contrast between the unpaved, uneven and stony road and the little office that Mr. Walter rented was stark. Next to one of the many buildings that would never be completed was another advertisement poster entitled 'arrival'. White people walk in suits and with suitcases in an enormous airport equipped with unheard of technologies – in this case an underground subway system. The big slogan of the poster read: 'So my dreams have finally come true. I am leaving for China. The beginning of a new life. Thanks to AALC.' The full name of Mr. Walter's organisation was 'Africa Asia Learning Connection.' The poster spoke of quality service and provided all the necessary contact details to get in touch with Mr. Walter.

The poster explicitly promised assistance with studies (medicine, engineering, business and computer sciences) and work (teaching, business consultancy and import export) in China. Yet, in radio announcements, the geographical scope of Mr.

Walter's agency was considerably bigger. The journalist of another local radio station was paid to include a few minutes of advertisement for AALC in his popular weekly programmes:

*AALC is the office that is close to the 'Amazing Pharmacy' in Molyko. That's the place where anybody who wants to go to bush can find his answer. Over there to get a visa for any Schengen country, it's apply now and go tomorrow. What does that mean? From the day that you apply, just know that you must already start to pack your bag. It only takes five working days for your visa to reach your table. Any Schengen country: Sweden, Finland, Holland, Denmark, Poland, Germany! None of this means anything to people at AALC. Two year visa – bang! Three years visa – bang! Or to go to China? You will talk a bit of 'yen hung' – that's not a small thing either. Africa Asia Learning Connection – they are the answer. Even Malaysia, anywhere you want to go, I'm telling you! Even Dubai – yes! Africa Asia Learning Connection can put you right inside the airplane. Say bye bye to your people at home. It's behind Amazing pharmacy that you can find them. As I am talking, I ought to give you their telephone number: 99 40 25 38 or 33 33 57 94.<sup>1</sup>*

In the announcement, the capacity and power of Mr. Walter's agency seem almost without limit. The journalist improvises the actual announcements every time afresh. He goes to the same church as Mr. Walter, and they have been long-standing friends. The radio announcement marked the speed of Mr. Walter's work as one of the distinguishing criteria of the quality of his work and services.

While the advertisement can obviously not be taken at face value, it does require serious analysis to understand why such claims and self-portrayals fall on fertile ground in a society of departure such I was studying in Buea. The INACOD signboard about stopping clandestine migration, in particular, presents a paradox. Why are migration brokers credible even as actors that fight illegal migration? How do migration brokers relate to the realm of the law?

The last chapter ended with an emphasis on trust between migration brokers and aspiring migrants. I will focus here on the limits of trust and credibility. In particular, I will ask how the limits of credibility relate to legal constraints. In doing so, I will to explore the relative place of state-enforceable law as opposed to the binding rules and customs generated in the social field of migration brokerage. I will then develop a particular focus on papers. Through this focus, I will explore relations between migration brokerage and instances of stateness. I will further explore how they have been able to establish themselves as migration brokers, as well as how the migration brokers' offices function. Through this analysis, I seek

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<sup>1</sup> 'AALC na that office wey e near amazing pharmacy for molyko. Na the place that wey any man wey e want fall bush, know say answer e don be. Because for them for get visa for go for any Schengen kontri na cam now now, go now now. E mean say weti, from the day wey you apply just know say you must pack your bag because you get only five working days for your visa for reach for your table. Any Schengen kontri: Sweden, Finland, Holland, Denmark, Poland, German man all that things dem for Africa Asia Learning Connection na no nothing. Two years visa - pimp, three years visa - pimp. Or na for go for China, you talk small yen hung, no be na any thing. Africa Asia Learning Connection na ye be the answer. Or na Malaysia, any side wey you want go, I tell wona say...or na Dubai yo, Africa Asia Learning Connection di put you for aeroplane. Say kontri man bye bye. Na for back Amazing pharmacy them dey; even as I de talk so I must give you tigrini tigini (contact number) again; 99 47 25 38 or 34 33 57 94.'

to contribute towards an investigation of the place of the law within conditions of departure.

***Migration brokerage and state authority: limits of credibility  
beyond the law***

The smuggling paradigm considers migration brokers in opposition to the state. The distinction in definition of smuggling and trafficking is that smugglers violate state borders (Gallagher 2002: 25-27; van Liempt 2006: 27-28) and traffickers violate the security of the migrants (Anderson 2007; Wong 2005: 80- 82).<sup>2</sup> From this legalistic point of view, smugglers work against the state. This chapter will problematise the supposed opposition between migration brokers and state authority.

While brokers produce papers that may result in what is characterized as illegal migration, laws of the Cameroonian state itself might not be violated. As pointed out in the introduction of this dissertation, questions on the respective realness or fakeness of travel documents will be raised only if and when they are of relevance to the actors in Cameroon.

My exploration of the relevance and reach of legal framework within societies of departure can broadly be understood as a study of legal consciousness (Silbey 2005; Fleury-Steiner & Nielsen 2006). This body of literature focuses on the understandings and meanings of law as they are manifest in social relations. Legal consciousness studies takes seriously what people do and say about law and includes the practices and discourses into the definition of the subject. Legal consciousness is thus an important step towards engaging with a study of law beyond the mere material manifestation of its textual foundations. Rather regrettably, scholars of legal consciousness have not yet sufficiently explored how legal consciousness itself contributes to the making of laws and law. A heavy bias within the literature towards studies of legal consciousness in European and North American contexts currently exists (for an interesting exception see Kohlhausen 2006).

While migration policy classifies migration brokers in terms of their respective legality or illegality, I suggest that this approach towards migration brokerage is based on beliefs about the reach of the law. We have seen in the preceding chapter that trust in migration brokers was based on other criteria of credibility rather than on the law. Instead of thus presupposing opposition, I explore connections and overlaps between migration brokers and instances of stateness. With instances of stateness, I refer to an ensemble of state actors and state institutions, as well as its regulatory instruments (such as papers) and normative frameworks (such as legality). I use the term stateness because I want to also include modalities of power and representational discourses that draw on the state as a set of institutions or a discursive construction (Mitchell 2006: 177- 182; Gupta 2006: 212- 213).

When thinking about ways to conceptualise the production of travel permits by migration brokers, I draw parallels with cross-border trade. Bayart, Hibou and Ellis remind us that so-called informal traders exploit opportunities created by the

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<sup>2</sup> For a historical and sociological discussion of how this legal definition came into being, see Ditmore (2003 & 2005).

state (1999: 18). Migration brokers, too, can only do their work because of restrictive legal frameworks that produce a demand and a possibility for them to offer their services. Were it not for the restrictive visa policies and immigration legislation, migration brokers would never have come into existence and would never have become the gate-keeper of bush as a scarce resource.

Not only migration brokers exist thanks to restrictive legal frameworks. Roitman and Hibou pointed to so-called informal manners of creating wealth that contribute to the viability of state power through the production of rents (Hibou 1999; Roitman 2005: 151-198). For military personnel and customs officials, rent on fraudulent commerce can be more important than official salaries. In part, cross-border traders manage to pay their taxes through banditry (Roitman 2004b). Smuggling and banditry thus creates wealth that is channelled to instances of state-ness both through tax, as well as through personalised transfers that complement the salaries of state officials.

By focusing on connections and overlaps between smugglers, migration brokers, road side bandits and state officials, the very boundaries between the supposed realm of the market and the state become subject to questioning. Through the empirical material on the work of migration brokers, this chapter explores ways of thinking about these connections and continuities.

While tracing the rise – and current closure — of these two migration broker offices, I analyse the role and function of their brokerage services in relation to other regulatory authorities, such as the state. I will explore the function, structure and the (cultural and other) repertoires on which the brokers draw to institute their authority.<sup>3</sup> Whilst one place is supposed to be governed by the laws of the law and the other by the laws of profit, I explore in this and the following chapter the importance of social law in both places. With social laws, I refer to norms and unwritten expectations, requirements and regulations. As regulatory authorities, both actors seek to establish control over migration trajectories.

The first section of this chapter will further look at the two key migration brokers and situate them vis-à-vis other types of brokerages – both within and beyond the strict field of migration brokerage. In this section, I argue that the credibility of migration brokers needs to be related to forms of paper production in the Cameroonian context of stateness. Through a close study of the biographical trajectory of Mr. James, the second section of this chapter demonstrates how migration brokers manage and control connections and information flows. Hence, the limits of legal frameworks for the credibility of migration brokers become clear. The third section analyses how Mr. James's office functions and how he relates to his employees. Through this discussion, the importance of information management as a crucial source of credibility for migration brokers becomes clear. The fourth and final section is dedicated to an exploration of state-enforceable legal frameworks as a supposed limit on the authority of migration brokers. It traces the trajectory of Mr. Walter as a migration broker.

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3 I take here inspiration from Wacquant's comparison between the prison and the ghetto as two institutions of racial domination (2000: 384). His work has helped me to look for commonalities between two different spaces.

## **To follow doki: the power of brokers and the production of papers**

To follow doki – Pidgin for following up on paper work – has come to stand largely for preparing and trying to travel out. Wanting to go out is synonymous with doing paper work. Papers hold strong powers over possibilities of mobility. Yet, many papers that are needed to apply for an international travel permit, such as for example reference letters for internships or certificates to document work experience, are not automatically issued in everyday life in Cameroon. Many types of employment (including the one of my own research assistant) occur without written work contracts. Consequently, many forms of documentation have to be obtained and produced throughout preparations for departure.

In this section, I discuss the credibility of migration brokers in relation to travel documents. Starting with the specific case of how I met the two key broker informants of this chapter, I then situate both migration brokers within a broader range of brokerage services. In the chapter, I argue that migration brokerage must be seen in relation to what it means for aspiring migrants to both acquire and use papers in Cameroon. The culture of the Cameroonian state (Bayart 1979) and the process of working its structure are crucial for the emergence of professionalised mediation. If access to services of the Cameroonian state requires professional mediation, then access to visas certainly does.

### ***First encounters with Mr. Walter and Mr. James: the power of a connection***

On the first day I met Mr. Walter, he was dressed in a red blazer, dark trousers, a yellow shirt and a tie. He was dressed both more formally, but also more colourfully than ordinary men on the streets of Buea. His clothing marked him as a big man who knew how to dress, i.e. how to ‘sape’. A man in his mid thirties, Mr. Walter is energetic and full of potential for even greater success in the future. He was the former neighbour of my host mother. When they met by chance on the street, she told him about my research project. He immediately called me and rushed to drive to the cultural centre where I had been at the time of his call. As we met for the first time, we went to a café and he eagerly explained his business strategy to me. He presented himself as a young entrepreneur doing import/export with China, as well as running several NGOs. The activities of his NGOs had died down, however, because they lacked the ‘international power’. External financial support had not been forthcoming.

He initially was more careful in his discussion concerning his bushfalling work, and gave the impression that it was more like a social service. He stressed that he sent out young Cameroonian business people that could not find work because companies were shutting down in Cameroon. He explained that he also helped to place motivated Cameroonian medical students with Chinese universities. Competition for places was strong and the attribution of places not always

entirely transparent. Given that the equipment at Chinese university hospitals was so much better than in Cameroon, Mr. Walter argued that 2,000 Dollars of tuition fees were not much to pay for the parents of such students. In the following two to three weeks, he was planning to send another about 50 Cameroonians to China. He planned to accompany them on their journey and he immediately proceeded to invite me to come along and join him. His friendliness made it clear that he would not have minded female company. He even implied that he would pay for my flight ticket. I vaguely replied with an evasive 'maybe.'

From day one, Mr. Walter was extremely open with me. As I later found out, he enjoyed showing off his powers to just about anyone and was thus also open to collaborating with my research assistant. Parading through town with a white woman beside him was also an additional source of pride and prestige to his already impressive reputation. Connections are key to his business activities he repeatedly explained to me. 'Nothing is too expensive for some relation.'

A great part of why Mr. Walter was so enthusiastic about meeting me was because I was from Europe. 'I want to have a breakthrough in Europe. If there is an opening for us ...?' Hence, I found myself in his office a mere two hours after our first initial encounter. Collaboration with me was a potential new avenue to new 'connections' and new sources of 'information.' Both are two key sources of authority that - as we shall later see - constitute the 'level' and 'powers' of a migration broker. Although Mr. Walter never pushed the line on me, he did suggest that I could indeed make millions if I were to somehow make sure to send him university admission letters in regular intervals.

Mr. Walter was set out to impress during all our interactions throughout the year. For hours, he would discuss with Delphine and me over lunch or dinner his many ambitious plans and programmes. His capacity to imagine plans and projects - mostly in relation to bush - seemed everlasting. At one time, he had wanted to stop his brokerage work and instead set up a computer firm. 'I've been raised in a straight way.' 'Money corrupts.' The other moment, he planned on coming to Western Europe with his NGO so that he can finally set up contacts there as well. He had also bought land in Buea to build and start a new school. He was going to provide scholarships for studies in 'bush' for students from his school. The bush element of his private school, he was confident, would draw many students.

After I had been researching for six months, he then came with the proposal of a contract marriage. Following my polite decline of the deal, his evening visits at my home nevertheless stretched still later. I confided my discomfort with one of my neighbours and pretended towards Mr. Walter to be an early morning person. After this, Mr. Walter disappeared. He had gone to bush. On his return, he explained that he had travelled to Romania. His capacity to come and leave the country is a key resource for him as a migration broker.

Although Mr. Walter once mentioned that my research could potentially close down lines, he did not consider that the consequences of my research project could be a threat to him personally. Lines are changing fast in his business. To be a broker means to always be on the move and seek out the next opening, programme, or opportunity. He considered himself too strong in terms of connections and powers

to give weight to the research project of a young woman. Furthermore, he knew and pointed out to me that people related, above all, to him as a person and not his agency as an institution. The name of his agency could be changed and so he did not mind that I took photos of his posters and advertisement material. He was proud of what he had achieved and established.

The attitude of Mr. James from INACOD had been similar. I had first sent my research assistant Delphine in the guise of a potential client of his. When I was later introduced to him via Delphine, Mr. James, proud of his agency, was open towards my questions and my research project. As a man in his late 30s, Mr. James sat in a big suit behind his office desk. Several phones and a closed laptop sat beside his desk, which was decorated with a map of the world, a plastic globe of the world and a small American flag. Behind Mr. James, was a poster from the University of Portsmouth and another world map.

Mr. James is of a certain standing in town. Like any big man, he has a stomach and proudly pats it while talking. He was always dressed in suits and always pleased to talk of himself as director. He had five staff members in his office in Buea. During my year of fieldwork, he opened another office in Bamenda with another seven staff members, as well as further contact points and potential new offices in Kumba, Yaoundé, Douala and Bafoussam. By the end of my fieldwork, he employed 26 people and, according to his records, had sent out 40- 55 people from his office in Buea within the year of 2008 alone.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. James was not manifestly rich, but certainly unequivocally recognized for his position as an international migration broker. He was seen to be somebody of international level. A taxi acquaintance of mine was even convinced that Mr. James had British nationality.

During fieldwork, Mr. James repeatedly asked me to participate in radio shows together with him and to lecture in his career counselling activities. I did the latter once and otherwise remained evasive. In return for giving me research material and subjects, I opted to pass on information, such as web addresses, a directory with websites of scholarship granting institutions and a small prospectus listing MA courses available at a graduate school at my university in the Netherlands. All of these, he could have downloaded free from the Internet. Yet, he was extremely grateful to me. The brochures I had brought were proof of his international power and level of connection. I do not believe he ever knew how to use the website directory of scholarship granting institutions. The office did not have an Internet connection and, although he talked about sending down one of his employees to research the information in a cyber café, I do not think that he ever actually did this. I was more valuable as a source of connection than of information.

The logical pursuit of his quest for connections was to propose marriage to me, which he did. In contrast to Mr. Walter, however, he always had a very matter-of-fact tone of proposing various types of marriage arrangements to me (with or without household tasks, excluding the necessity of childbirth or even any kind of

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4 No systematic and reliable records are made on people that are sent out. Hence this number represents the mere minimum for which I found written evidence.

sexual engagement within the matrimonial union). In the course of a year, ever-new ways of reacting to, dodging, evading and joking about the topic of marriage emerged. I insisted that I was already taken and jokingly suggested that he might like a friend of mine who was going to visit me in Buea. He accepted and thus changed his relation towards me. I was no longer a potential spouse, but in the absence of my friend's biological family in Cameroon was now conferred the role of a member of his potential family-in-law. Because he did not know my friend's mother, he conferred this role to me and started making his bridewealth payments to me. He gave me small gifts of money to buy mangos, a drink or just for my taxi ride back home. Delphine now jokingly referred to Mr. James as her brother-in-law (in Pidgin 'moyo').

When my female friend arrived from France, she gracefully accepted to go for lunch with Mr. James and me. Marriage came up in conversation, as did a photo opportunity. The picture of the three of us later appeared on a wall with other pictures in both his offices in Buea and Bamenda. The photos proved our official partnership. His demands for marriage began to ease off.

Just as his openness and cooperation was key to my research, I, too, was an important resource for him. There was between Mr. James and me a sense of reciprocal gratitude, scepticism, but also a humorously light and even intimate tone around our negotiations of marriage. Even after my friend's departure, Mr. James dashed me money for transport. It is the way a big man treats a child, a potential lover or somebody within his responsibility.

The status of migration brokers as 'big men' is always especially manifest in the ways they related to women – not just me. My informant Pamella (preceding chapter) or female secretaries employed by Mr. James had similar dynamics. The two secretaries employed by Mr. James, for example, were replaced at an incredible rate every few months. It seems that none of them ever got beyond their trial period. When Delphine and I tried to explore why one after the other female secretary left the office, one of the former secretaries enigmatically told us that 'some can bear what others cannot.'

### ***Range of mediators for migration: dokimen, feymen and big men***

At the beginning of my fieldwork, Delphine told me that a man in a beer parlour who claimed to be able to help her with a visa for bush had approached her. She laughed and explained that money to invite her for two drinks was not going to convince her he actually had the power to bring her to bush. If a man looks poor and he runs around claiming to be able to help people fall bush, then why is he not in bush himself? She did not believe the man in the beer parlour was genuine in terms of his 'powers'. To her mind, he was only pretending to be a broker so as to impress and flirt with her. What is the landscape in which brokers like Mr. James and Mr. Walter operate? What different types of migration brokers exist?



In the early 1990s, there were no migration broker offices in Buea. Yet, during fieldwork in 2008, I came across a whole series of different types of migration brokerage:

- Individual facilitators that address visa applicants in front of embassies;
- Dokimen that specialize in the production of travel documents;
- Individual agents with important contacts;
- Fake agencies that offer services in (scam) emails;
- NGOs that send out members to conferences;
- Small trading companies that facilitate business visas in addition to their primary commerce;
- Out-sourced student recruitment centres for various private business schools in Europe;<sup>5</sup>
- Well-established offices specialized in study and work migration, like the ones of Mr. James and Mr. Walter

Mr. James was specialised in sending people to Dubai. Mr. Walter was known for his connections to China. At times, Mr. Walter would transfer a client who wanted to go to Dubai to Mr. James and Mr. James could transfer a client who wanted to go to China to Mr. Walter. Both had their specialisations. Yet, collaboration is rare. Both claim, try and were known in Cameroon to also send clients to Europe. While other facilitators might distribute flyers and put up posters, they actually made radio announcements and were visible through their respective offices.

Mr. James had a small office on top of a cyber café and a money transfer company. The signboard in front of the office drew attention to Mr. James's office under the name of INACOD (International Assistance for Community Development). Mr. Walter had a small office right next to the university campus of Buea. A big signboard at the side of the road invited people to work over to his 'Common Initiative Group' called 'Africa Asia Learning Connection' (AALC).<sup>6</sup> The office itself was small, staffed by two secretarial employees who received clients in the reception room while Mr. Walter was mostly travelling and working in much more mobile fashion.

Mr. James and Mr. Walter's main strategies were using 'document dispatch', which does not put at stake the physical safety of aspiring migrants (Spener 2009:3 123). Document dispatching is relatively expensive when compared to other strategies of migration brokerage, like for example overland crossings. Nevertheless, state officials can reject travel documents - dependent on the intensity of controls and the nature of the travel permit. Various sorts of document dispatching are the most common form of migration brokerage in Cameroon. Those who cannot afford migration brokers are left with attempting to leave the country overland or trying their luck at an Embassy (see the following chapter).

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5 I notably studied one office in Buea and Douala that had been officially charged by a series of business schools in Europe to recruit students. Entry into such programmes depended on the financial resources of the parents of the respective student and his or her marks at school.

6 Common Initiative Groups have a slightly different legal status in Cameroon than Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Document dispatch involves the buying of papers from other mediators or directly from contacts within state institutions or other mediators, or the scanning and graphic production of counterfeit documents. I have never heard employees discuss the difference between papers that are bought from state institutions or mediators, or papers that are produced by the broker himself. For one thing, the employees of migration brokers with whom I worked were hardly involved with the actual preparations of departure. The many levels of mediators in the migration process concealed the differences between a travel document from a state institution or another mediator – but in certain ways also rendered these differences negligible.

Clients are usually not given their travel documents until they arrive at the airport on the day of departure. Both brokers stated that clients might otherwise lose the travel documents or become subjects of witchcraft by jealous people around them. The power of travel documents is too strong to allow them to be held and stored by just anyone. Thus, clients do not usually have the means or time to know through which means their migration broker has been able to attain and provide them with travel documents. The only thing that matters on the day of departure is whether or not they will be able to leave the country because they have the papers needed to do so. It is thus only during the actual event of the border crossing that the powers of a travel document become apparent.

Besides Mr. Walter, Mr. James and a former employee of Mr. James called Mr. Peter, I met three other migration brokers in Buea. Two of these brokers work together. Their services were much more limited. As a team, they mostly advertised seminars and conferences for the purpose of bushfalling. Without a fixed agency name or a steady office, they became individuals who happen to have a few pieces of information that can be useful in bushfalling. Their clothing, their behaviour and their language made it clear that they were ordinary people. No one would mistake them for real big men. Their credibility was not broad enough to establish any other claim. Even bushfalling had not made them successful businessmen.

The opposite case was Mr. Ekkas; a successful businessman – and formerly deported bushfaller – who every now and then used his business trips or connections to send one or two people out. His main profession was retail of electronic equipment, such as mobile phones. He is the only broker to whom I ever talked who considered that sending people out was trafficking and that it was illegal to pass on visas to people who wanted to travel. Mr. Ekkas built up the capital stock for his current business while working as an undocumented migrant in bush. He became successful through bushfalling, and his extended experience as an undocumented migrant in bush most likely led him to internalise that it was illegal, as well as morally problematic to sell visas.

If he nevertheless chose to on occasion to make a bit of extra money through sending people to bush, he only did so because he felt he had to compensate for heavy tax pressures on his two stores. 'I'm doing anything because I'm obliged to meet up with government taxes.' Taxation in Cameroon is unpredictable and often harsh. Just like in a popular song in Pidgin, my informants kept reiterating that

taxation was killing business.<sup>7</sup> They regretted that many businessmen could only survive if they could pay bribes or had connections with state officials. This is also the reason why both Mr. James and Mr. Walter's offices were registered as 'Common Initiative Groups' – a Cameroonian legal status for what might otherwise be considered an NGO. Only these supposedly non-profit and non-governmental organisations can hope to avoid the harsh demand of taxation officers. Thus to meet up with government taxation, Mr. Ekkas sought extra sources of income through occasionally operating as a migration broker. This very example demonstrates how strongly both illegal and illegitimate practices are intertwined with state practices.

Mr. Ekkas explained to Delphine and me that 'bushfalling is lack of information.' According to him, 'anyone can make somebody to travel.' Delphine contradicted him ardently. She believed that only some people have the 'power' to send people out. Mr. Ekkas laughed and shrugged that there was no 'magic' involved. Yet, the world of bush is often beyond comprehension and a source of authority. This makes it comprehensible that those who make the transformation of ordinary people into bushfallers are considered as having special 'powers'. Mr. Ekkas is aware of these conceptions in town. 'They look at us as if we were doing miracles. We're not doing miracles.'

Being knowledgeable of openings and having connections to bush rates much higher on a scale of credibility than merely being able to produce or arrange for papers that can facilitate one's attempt at emigration. Hence, Mr. James and Mr. Walter resisted being grouped within the category of dokimen. 'We want things to be very moral, very straight. We've come here to stay,' Mr. James explained to me. He declared to me that he was beyond doki work. He no longer needed to get his hand dirty with that kind of work. He claimed that he was able to replace paper work with knowledge and connections as a source of authority for his brokerage work. He said that he was now on a higher level as a broker. He was now sending out his clients through the specific knowledge of particular visa application procedures or through the specific kinds of visas or residence permits that he could get straight from bush through new connections of his.

Both Mr. Walter and Mr. James saw the distinction between dokimen and the work that they do as important. Mr. Walter told me that he would always try to avoid being caught producing false papers, but obviously also relied on connections to make his work come through. Both Mr. James and Mr. Walter claimed to have risen beyond the stage of mere dokimen; they said that they did not get their hands dirty anymore.

Big men can provide their clients with travel documents because they know about visa application procedures and entry routes or can acquire the necessary

7 In a very interesting song, the artist Awilo sings about how he wants to fall bush. He connects bushfalling to the political and economic situation in Cameroon. Besides a lack of freedom of speech, he blames arbitrary and hard taxation practices for the lack of economic growth. A few selected lyrics of his song 'I want to [be] a bushfaller,' translated into English: 'Political parties in Cameroon have become like NGOs that fight for foreign aid. [...] He [Paul Biya] said we should create great ambitions. But every time we stay behind to create [i.e. the great ambitions], taxation also creates in our back [i.e. wealth]. Where is the development then? Tell me!' The original in Pidgin: 'Partie politique for Cameroon e don turn like NGO, wey dem dey fight for foreign aid. [...] Great ambition e don talk se we must to create this time. But time way we left back for dey create, taxation dey create too for we back. Whussy the development dey alors? Tell me!'

papers, whether authentic or counterfeit, through their connections. These connections can be both connections to state institutions or to other mediators who in their turn have connections to state institutions. In light of the potentially illegal nature of some of this work, how do aspiring migrants evaluate the trustworthiness of the travel documents that migration brokers promise to give to them?

### ***Beyond illegality: powerful brokers and papers that work***

All throughout the year of fieldwork, I was always struck by the way in which people talked about getting their papers in bush. There are dokimen who are specialized in the production and sale of papers. Typically, doki papers are produced at the roadside by people working behind small tables and equipped with typewriters. Such dokimen can be found in front of official offices, such as the immigration office in Yaoundé.

When I first learned Pidgin, I believed that the word doki had an illegal undertone. Yet, when I asked a lecturer at the University of Buea to write a letter of invitation for me to apply for a six month research visa, my host mother and research assistant jokingly referred to this piece of paper as doki, too. They did so because it would have been more correct or official for me to receive a letter of invitation from the head of department rather than from a simple lecturer. Had I thus attained my visa for Cameroon with the help of a dokiman?

Navaro-Yashin suggests that a closer look at the production of documents as material artefacts and their inclusion into bodies of official knowledge unravels the potential fake 'quality inherent to all papers and forms of documentation' (2007: 94). She points us to the importance of processes of production of official documents. Processes of paper production are complex. Therefore, papers are not essentially legal or illegal. The example of my letter of invitation demonstrated the scope of interpretations that are possible for integrating papers into a body of legal documents. The Cameroonian Embassy accepted my letter of invitation and I was granted a legal visa.

The word doki in Anglophone Cameroon points us towards the volatility of legal processes of paper production. In Pidgin, the word doki can refer to all forms of paper documentation. To further delineate precarious forms of paper production and multiple levels of mediation within the context of Cameroonian forms of stateness, the next chapter on visa interviews will give a graphic example of how Delphine struggled to get a passport. In this section, I focus on discussing the importance and normality of mediation within the Cameroonian context of stateness.

Smith's research on the 'culture of corruption' in Nigeria, for example, shows how state institutions and their services in Nigeria are only accessible through additional service providers, such as 'touts' (Smith 2007: 60). Similar to the cases of other countries on the African continent (Hornberger 2009: 90; Blundo 2006: 809; Lund 2007), people's strategies in Cameroon for approaching state institutions often is to try and personalise relations or, in the absence of this possibility, to pass through a mediator. Intermediaries can be independent businessmen, bureau-

crats or extended family members. In the Cameroonian context, to attain papers through mediators is so much part of everyday experiences that they do not put into question the quality or legitimacy of the attained paper.

While some intermediaries can be 'venal and unscrupulous in their dealings with the public' (Smith 2007: 60), Smith also reminds us that intermediaries also offer valuable services in the face of a corrupt and highly personalized bureaucracy (Smith 2007: 60). Even if mediators pursue their own interests, they often also allow their clients to save money and time. In the preceding chapter, we already saw how intermediaries within the field of migration are greatly respected and admired.

When after the end of fieldwork, I shared with Delphine the news that the two offices of migration brokers where we had conducted research were no longer in existence, she was shocked, but did not fundamentally change her view and evaluation of the two brokers. In an interview a few months after her arrival in Europe, she told me the following:

*I will respect both of them because they have the power to get the visa. They have the power to make you have the visa in your passports. I don't know what they do or what it takes, but [...] the important thing is that you are in Europe and it's because of him.*

Delphine's statement illustrates an interesting type of consciousness regarding how the credibility of migration brokers is evaluated. With respect to the travel permits that migration brokers issue and give to their clients, what matters most to Delphine and other informants is not the 'legality' of papers but their 'capacity'. The question to ask about travel documents is whether these papers 'work' and enable people to travel. In his discussion of the use and meaning of papers, Bakewell has come to similar conclusions. He distinguishes between states that look at paper in terms of their 'symbolic' value and the individuals of his research in North West Zambia who look at papers in terms of their 'function' (2007).<sup>8</sup>

To be able to grasp how the rise and fall of migration brokers is understood and explained in the Cameroonian context, one also needs to think in terms of power. This is the way Delphine evaluated the credibility of Mr. Walter as a migration broker:

*Even if they claim more than they actually deliver, if five people are applying and then you give visa to three or two persons that is something big. Because the five people could still go to the embassy on their own and none of them will have it. So if five people apply and two go, then it's something to ride home with.*

Respectively, the power of a broker is evaluated based on the power of his connections and papers.

Many times during fieldwork, I would not know the exact channels or procedures through which either of my two key migration brokers produce the travel permits for their clients. Yet, beyond the limits of what I could empirically observe,

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<sup>8</sup> According to Kohlhagen, different conceptions of paper are the consequences of the respective social and legal context of an individual (2006) and ought thus not be essentialised as being either European or Cameroonian.

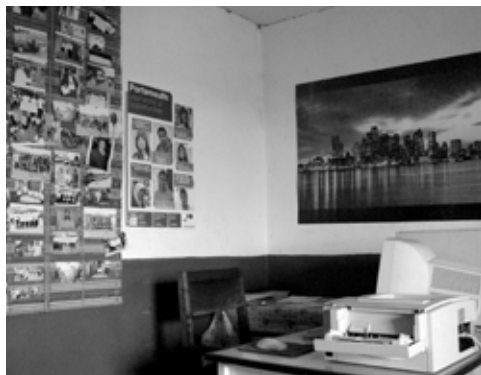
the question of whether a travel document is fake or real is also in many ways objectively indeterminable or irrelevant. A so called fake travel permit can still work and allow the holder of the permit to cross a border point.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter will continue to explore sources and limits of credibility of migration brokers using the terms of aspiring migrants and not in relation to state-defined terms of legality and legitimacy. Having set out the moral economy of brokerage in general and migration brokerage in particular, the second section of this chapter will be devoted to a study of Mr. James as a migration broker and how his credibility relied on the management of information and connections.

### **The emergence of Mr. James as a migration broker: moral economies of connectivity and information as currency**

This section focuses on the perceptions of people of Mr. James's services. It then moves on to discuss the personal emergence of Mr. James as a migration broker, his creation of INACOD as an agency and the how clients and people in Buea viewed and experienced it. The value of information and connection – to both the international level and appearances of stateness – are two key explanatory points for the emergence of Mr. James as a migration broker.

#### ***Perceptions of clients***



7. INACOD: flows of information

The first thing that one sees upon entering the office of Mr. James is a big poster of a skyline of skyscrapers that resemble Hong Kong. On one of my first days, the secretary proudly told me that she herself had bought the poster and had put it up in the reception room (see photo 7). It's a photo of Paris, she happily told me. The street hawker had told her that it was Paris. I double-checked the writing at the bottom of the poster, which was incomprehensible to me, but certainly was written in Chinese

characters and not in Latin letters. She repeated that the poster was a photo of Paris

9 The reverse can equally be true. The Canadian consulate section in Paris did not accept as being genuine an attestation in which I certified that Delphine had been working for me in Cameroon. The attestation was judged dubious because it did not contain enough 'securities'. While Delphine's work relationship might be categorised by certain state actors as 'informal', her work was certainly not illegal.

and none of my expressions of doubt led her to question the poster. Was I insulting her poster by implying that it might merely be a city in Asia and not Europe? Whatever the value economy of her acquisition, she certainly chose to continue to believe what the hawker had told her. I was not enough of an authority on the matter and I did not consider it terribly important to insist on correcting her vision. She was happy to see Paris every day upon opening the door to her office.

During the year of 2008, 784 by-passers had signed the registry of the NGO - showing that a constant and steady flow of people came to the office for information and advice. Male by-passers outnumbered female by-passer by 5:1, and the ratio for those who actually travelled was one of 2: 1. The office of INACOD in Buea sent a minimum of 42 people out to bush in 2008, of which 34 went to Dubai.<sup>10</sup> The other eight clients travelled to South Africa, Europe and, curiously enough, one person to South Korea.

Within the course of my research period, I saw the office of INACOD rapidly transform itself. Initially, only two of the four rooms were sparsely furnished. Later, two sofas were added to the reception room and to Mr. James' office. A two-meter big world map and several Swiss Air posters were added to the walls. An inflatable red plastic airplane hung in the reception room. Then collection of books of varying quality and on haphazard topics created the impression of a consultation library (see photo 8).



8. INACOD: international connections

Posters from Portsmouth University and brochures from private business schools across the world were lying around and illustrated the level of international connection on which Mr. James relied for his work. To walk into the office of the director, one also has to pass one of the Swiss Air posters onto which an INACOD poster had been inserted. The Swiss air and INACOD poster were joined in such a manner as to create the impression that the two were official 'partners'.

A few days before my departure, a new award with which Mr. James had been decorated by a group of journalists called the 'Watchdog Newspaper Group' appeared on the walls of the office. In a frame and on very official looking paper the award reads: 'The most reliable institute for international assistance to travel abroad - review of agencies in the North West, South West, West and Centre Province.'

While the director received his clients sitting beside his laptop, I have never seen him work on the computer, nor have I seen the laptop actually switched on.

<sup>10</sup> This number is the bare minimum for which I have concrete evidence and excludes the welders and nursing programme for Dubai. The actual number of clients sent out to bush is hence probably higher. Neither INACOD, nor the agency of Mr. Walter (AALC) kept a clear record of whom they were sending out and where to.

One day, he had trouble with his rubber stamp. The cushion was dry and the entire box was made out of plastic. 'This one correct for you people,' the director stated in an irritated manner. 'It is not presentable.' He then proceeded to ring the little bell he recently had installed under his table. On hearing the ring, the secretary entered and the director ordered her to buy a better one. Hierarchical power relations are important for his position of authority and overall credibility. He was enacting the role of a director.

Mr. James loves to always refer to his international 'partners', of which I am one, too. A big photo wall in the reception room documents various activities, such as when the 'American Biographical Institute' gave him an award because he had 'changed and improved the life of people around him'. This award was well received in his office and community. Delphine was impressed. 'A whole international something!' she exclaimed. In addition, the secretary approvingly stated the status of Mr. James had further improved: 'The level of the director has become high.'<sup>11</sup>

The American Biographical Institute (ABI) is a publisher based in the United States and specialized in biographical reference directories since 1967. It generated revenue from sales of certificates and books. Politicians and journalists denounced its awards as frauds. Yet, it was only on my return to the world of constant Internet access that the idea came to me to further enquire into this 'whole international something' Mr. James had won. For those in his office, this certification marked him as a man of international standing and certainly one with connections.

His clients respected this official air of his function. Despite her scepticism, Pamella still saw Mr. James as an Ambassador helping her leave the country. 'Your job is not just for Cameroonians, for individuals. You're like an Ambassador for Cameroon.' Ambassadors are representatives of state authority. In the Anglophone Cameroonian context can also refer to the representation of villages or home communities in other regions in Cameroon. I was struck during fieldwork to find many bars with names related to Embassies; some of these bars in the South West Province included the names of villages in the North West Province.

In their interactions, Pamella did not only compliment Mr. James on being an Ambassador, she also referred to Mr. James as chief. By calling Mr. James a chief, Pamella confirmed his authority, but also his social role and responsibility. In his village of origin in the North West province, Mr. James was nominated national youth director. In this function, he organized football tournaments donated with prizes. He also proudly told me how he was intending to make connections between those in the village and bushfallers from his village of origin in the North West Province.

When I talked with Pamella's father about the difficulties and risks of bushfalling, he told me that this was precisely why he went to 'this new department', referring to the office of INACOD. Concerning the necessary papers for travelling out, he assured me that Pamella already had a passport. 'Yes, it is difficult to have a visa, but this department...office here can help.' Pamella's parents chose to trust 'this new department' set up by Mr. James.

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<sup>11</sup> 'The level of the director don up.'



The word 'department' references a public authority and often is used in relation to state institutions. It is as if, for Pamella's father, the manager of INACOD and the people at the embassy was part of the same official world. In this light, it is also understandable why Pamella's parents had little doubts about the quality of the travel documents that Mr. James would produce for their daughter.

When trying to ease Pamella's scepticism, Mr. James boasted that an earlier client of his had managed to enter the infamously reputed airport of Charles de Gaulle with travel permits of the same kind. He explained that officials at the airport had scanned the paper under a machine and it came up good. 'The security is inside.' To demonstrate his point, he took a 10,000 CFA banknote and held it under the calculator on his table. He then pressed a button that switched on a blue light, which was meant to verify the authenticity of the 10,000 CFA banknote. He showed us how magically another layer of script suddenly appears on the banknote. With this powerful demonstration, the discussion of the quality of Pamella's travel documents was closed. This act did not actually prove anything about the quality or nature of the papers that he promised to provide to Pamella. During the entire conversation, Pamella's travel documents were discussed, but not actually present. However, to be able to make script appear where nothing could normally be seen, demonstrated and validated his expertise over matters of paper. The blue light exercise carried out with a bank note proved his authority and special knowledge.

Mr. James later mentioned to me that he had received Pamella's residence permit through a contact person of his in Italy. Yet, the details of how Mr. James attained the travel documents with which he was promising to make Pamella travel was never a topic of conversation between Pamella's parents and me. Mr. James was credible for Pamella's parents because they did not trust themselves to work the necessary papers for bushfalling. As pointed out in the preceding chapter, they also trusted him because they were personally connected to him and because they believed in his claims to have very good connections.

Mr. James liked to talk of his partners abroad, yet he had not heard a British person pronounce Portsmouth. I never heard anyone commenting on his pronunciation of the town of Portsmouth. As I have already mentioned in the first chapter, Mr. James has never travelled outside of Cameroon himself.<sup>12</sup> How was it thus possible for Mr. James to set himself up as a migration broker?

### ***The biographical trajectory of Mr. James and the emergence of his office***

Mr. James comes from a rather poor family in a small village in the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon. Due to the economic and social circumstances of his early life, he only had a technical certificate upon leaving school. He repaired refrigerators and worked for a road construction company, while studying and saving money so he could go to school and pass both his O and A-level exams respectively in 1995 and 1997. With these qualifications, he was able to find work

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<sup>12</sup> This fact only Pamella, but none of his other clients or employees were aware of.

for a German NGO, and this was the beginning of his ascension to the status of a big man. He worked for the Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), a prestigious semi-public German development agency.

During his years with the GTZ, Mr. James was in charge of promoting health insurance and other forms of social security systems. During the time he worked for the international NGO, he began doing minor paperwork for people who wanted to go out. This doki work could be anything from helping people to fill in forms - e.g. visa or university applications - to establishing other connections or actually manufacturing papers. After a few years, Mr. James decided to open up his own NGO. When we met, INACOD was only about a year old.

Most of the clients of INACOD go to Dubai. Because Dubai does not have an Embassy in Cameroon, Mr. James mediates between his clients and authorities in Dubai. The Dubai lines cost 1.8 million CFA and include a (one-way) flight, pick-up from the airport, the visa, a few days' accommodation and supposed assistance with the job hunt. The employees of INACOD in charge of funding proposals for development projects explained that they were dealing directly with the ministry of foreign affairs in Dubai, which had commissioned an agency to handle visas. INACOD scans the passports of its clients and sends these to the handling agency in Dubai. The visa is then sent to INACOD in the form of a letter. Instead of a stamp or sticker within the passport of the respective traveller, this simple piece of paper constitutes the permit to travel and allows for entry into Dubai territory upon arrival at the airport.

In part, prior successful travel programmes opened the path to new partners. For example, a nurse in Dubai helped Mr. James to send other nurses to Dubai for their respective requalification exams. With a regular contact person in Dubai, INACOD had truly gone international. Implying that there were also other offices in the world, the posters in Mr. James's office now read 'INACOD Cameroon'.

The money involved in bushfalling lines generates its own dynamics and ever-new lines. One of Mr. James's clients managed to find work with a company in Dubai as a welder. With time, he decided to give up on hustling and make his money through bushfalling. He made deals with companies in Dubai to recruit welders and mechanic drivers from Cameroon. These companies pay for the visas and flight tickets of their future employees.

Some welders that came to the office were only really looking for a job - with no bushfalling intentions in their minds. Nevertheless, they had to pay for getting a job. At only 1.3 million CFA, this line is extremely cheap - particularly since it included a fixed job upon arrival. In addition, these lucky bushfallers received a three year contract, which was remunerated with a monthly salary of 700,000 CFA - 1.000 Euros - and included paid trips back to Cameroon every year.

Within the whole field of bushfalling lines, this was an extremely good deal. For once, Delphine and I did not fight when she suggested getting her brother into this programme.<sup>13</sup> Yet, this programme was also a good financial deal for Mr. James. The manager of the programme and his assistant in Dubai received 900,000

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13 He was rather unsuccessfully hustling in Malabo.

CFA of the 1.3 million CFA. With 35 places for welders, this left a profit of 14 million CFA – roughly 21,300 Euro— for INACOD. ‘If we took 2.5 million, it will be business,’ Mr. James told me when we discussed the financial details of this Dubai programme for welders.

Mr. James made sure that the available job openings were distributed across his various offices. On the phone, he reassured the office manager of Bamenda and promised a fixed rate of openings for his office as part of an effort to give preferential treatment to clients from the North West Province. He explained to me later that he introduced fixed rates for every office to have enough success cases in every region that could then draw in new clients.

Connections are everything for a broker. At one point, Mr. James had a contact person in South Africa that could get three Cameroonian passports stamped with visas in Swaziland. The 250,000 CFA per passport he needed to pay in commission was minimal in comparison to the money he could ask for these passports from his clients. Another trick he used was to put Nigerian visas into the Cameroonian passports to increase the trust of the South African visa officials. None of these five successful South African visas allowed work, but that was not mentioned during his festive mood when he received the successfully stamped passports.

Mr. James told me that people regularly come to his door and offer him new lines. He saw himself as a shield and mediator between those people and his clients. An agency can be less easily duped than an individual can. If anything goes wrong, he stands as a guarantee and will reimburse his clients at least 70 percent of the money they have paid. At the end of the day, only one of his clients going to South Africa was allowed into the country. The other two were repatriated. Instead of reimbursing, he persuaded them to accept to go to Dubai. He knows he can always operate this line successfully.

In addition to the value of connections, information constitutes currency as well. People of Anglophone Cameroon commonly ask somebody in or with connections to bush to find admission. Universities, too, are perceived of as closed. Hence a bulk of clients seeks the help of INACOD for admission with foreign universities. Mr. James had placed himself and his agency in this niche. Even though he has never been to university himself, he promised to find admission. To open a file with him cost 15,000 CFA. For assistance with the application, admission letter and visa application procedure, INACOD charged 300,000 CFA.

Mr. James's key to success in these finding admission tasks was to offer and advertise American and British Universities that had off-site campuses in Dubai or other countries for which a visa could be acquired more easily than in the U.S.A. and Great Britain. These lines were not more expensive than ordinary bushfalling lines and he justified expenses for the often times high tuition fees with the potential to receive scholarships in subsequent years. Without the work of Mr. James even these expensive international study possibilities would not have been known. He was creating value through channelling young aspiring migrants to these universities abroad. In conversation with his clients, he favourably compared these bushfalling lines for studies with the normal hustling way of going to bush.

A recent innovation in his office drawing a lot of attention was a blackboard publicly visible outside its doors with international job placement and scholarships. Although these ads were merely cut and paste from the Internet, they offered great respectability to the powers of his agency. In the absence of career centres for educational guidance, a commercial migration agency in the form of an NGO could offer genuine services of information by making public such ads or having on show university prospectuses from abroad.

In the biographical transformation of Mr. James from a construction site worker to a doki man and then ultimately to a big man, we realised how important knowledge and connections were. Mr. James began with the production of papers and then was able to establish himself as an equal partner to governmental institutions. Mr. James had been able to build himself up as a migration broker by coordinating between his clients and other brokers and mediators. Various levels of mediation existed and, in part, Mr. James was but the public face of underlying connections.

While Mr. James's social perceptions in town depended on his capacity to perform bush, his capacity to deliver depended on other layers of mediators. Legality was hardly visible or tangible for aspiring migrants within this scale of evaluation of the credibility of migration brokers. While mediation at various levels was crucial for the success of migration brokerage, information on access routes and procedures was only very partially shared with aspiring migrants and even with collaborators. Relations between Mr. James and his employees were a pivotal example for analysing how information, even within brokerage offices, were managed and (not) shared. If the limits of credibility of a migration broker were not evaluated according to the potential legality or illegality of access routes to bush, then one must ask how Cameroonians interpreted the failure of a migration broker.

### **Closure: the limits of a director and his department**

A year after the end of fieldwork, I heard that Mr. James's office had closed and that he was in prison. Was INACOD after all more of an 'illegal' agency that had to shut down because of the 'criminal' nature of its activities? Had his clients been wrong to trust him? These are typical questions outside observers in Europe have about migration brokers. Having explained how the value of information and connectivity were key to the rise of Mr. James as migration broker, this section focuses on the actual ways INACOD functioned. What caused the closing down of his office? What are his connections to instances of stateness – both territorial and deterritorial?

There are two levels of analysis to the question of the limits of the credibility of Mr. James as migration broker. First at the most concrete level, I explore causes of failure and closing down of the office of INACOD. Secondly, at a conceptual level, I explore the limits of migration brokerage by exploring connections between the

confines of market and state. I do so by examining connections of Mr. James to instances of stateness. By doing so, I seek to examine the limits of Mr. James in terms that are relevant to aspiring migrants in Cameroon.

***Limits of trust between migration brokers, mediators and employees:  
the closing down of INACOD***

After news had reached me that Mr. James has had to close his office, I asked the best friend of my former research assistant to investigate the causes of the sudden closure of the INACOD office. She was able to find out from former INACOD office workers that the manager of the INACOD office in Bamenda had employed a Francophone man called Bertin who promised to have a programme that could make eight people travel to Canada. The eight families each raised the required four million CFA – roughly 6,000 Euros. The INACOD manager in Bamenda thus gathered 32 million CFA – roughly 49,000 Euros — with most passed on to Bertin who was in charge of operating the programme. The families of the eight aspiring migrants had been told that the visas were ready and would be handed out at the airport on the day of departure. Bertin was not there when the families of these eight aspiring bushfallers turned up at the airport. Almost strangled that evening at the airport, apparently the police had to intervene and protect Mr. James from his clients.

Bertin had duped the manager of the INACOD office in Bamenda and both INACOD offices in Bamenda and Buea had to close down. Trying to calm down the situation, Mr. James managed to use some remaining INACOD funds to send six of the eight clients who had wanted to go to Canada to Dubai and Cyprus instead. Whether or not these clients liked Dubai as a country of destination, Mr. James, in this way, made them leave the country and thus turned them into bushfallers. However, one of these eight clients came from an influential family with many connections within the justice system of Cameroon and thus filed a court case against Mr. James. He was put into prison for six months.

Wanting to understand better why Mr. James had ended up in prison, I asked my new research assistant to interview former employees of INACOD. Originally from the North West Province, Mr. Edward was one of these employees. He had worked as a teacher and had done many different projects for various NGOs before taking on a job with INACOD. He found that INACOD was original in that it was largely self-funded through its bushfalling projects. At times, clients were permitted to deposit land certificates as guarantees rather than actual cash payments. One of the clients who had signed up for Bertin's failed Canada programme had done so. The land certificate of this client was worth five times the required 4,000,000 CFA for the programme.<sup>14</sup> When the Canada programme failed, Mr. James was imprisoned for using the land for purposes not agreed upon by the father of his client.

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<sup>14</sup> The manager of INACOD and the father of the boy had agreed that the boy would send 4,000,000 CFA back to Mr. James upon his arrival in Canada. When the price for the programme had been paid, Mr. James was to return the land certificate to the father of the boy.

Mr. James had used the land certificate to secure a loan from the Bamenda Police Credit Union. Mr. Edward drafted a business plan for commerce in electronics between Dubai and Cameroon. And the Bamenda Police Credit Union was willing to fund this business idea on the condition of a security in the form of a land certificate. In contrast to the narrative of the other employees of INACOD, the project writer claimed that Mr. James misused the land certificate and the loan from the Bamenda Police Credit Union. He charged Mr. James with having squandered the money. When reading the interview transcript, I was struck at how closely the police staff had been involved in providing funds to one of the projects of INACOD right at the point of the fall of the office.

I was curious to find out more about how former employees and neighbours experienced the fall of INACOD. Had Mr. James lost his credibility after this fatal Canada programme? Six months after Mr. James's initial imprisonment, I had a chance to travel to Cameroon. Although all employees of INACOD had to change their telephone numbers to avoid harassment from former clients, I was able to speak to all except the former secretaries.

While the project writer blamed Mr. James for being greedy, another former employee (and director of a secondary school) thoroughly defended Mr. James. Not wanting to tarnish the image of the to him still existing agency of INACOD, this former employee told me that the entire fault lay with the office manager in Bamenda who had been duped by Bertin. In this narrative, Mr. James became a victim sent to prison for a crime he had not committed. Another former office worker of INACOD – a woman in her late 30s, mother of several children, lecturer at the university and PhD candidate – told me that she pitied Mr. James for his weaknesses because he was limited in his skills and had not listened to the advice of others. While acknowledging fully the limits of Mr. James' capacity to deliver on his promises, she still maintained a level of respect for him, as her own brother was able to travel to Dubai with the help of Mr. James.

The above case raises questions about the management of information and trust between the main migration broker within an office and his employees. In the INACOD office in Buea, Mr. James employed two secretaries, two educational advisors, one programme manager and one public relations manager. They earned between 5,000 and 85,000 CFA and came from the North West and South West Province.<sup>15</sup> The failure of the public sector to make education a worthwhile employment activity is striking when looking at employees at INACOD. Two of them were qualified teachers who could not make ends meet and needed additional employment opportunities. The other was a Ph.D. student at the University of Buea who chose to temporarily give up her post at the university because employment by Mr. James was more profitable for her. Migration brokers are better employers than schools and universities.

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<sup>15</sup> As a point of comparison, formally employed primary school teachers earn 110,000 CFA; secondary school teachers can earn between 160,000 and 180,000 CFA and formally employed university lecturers earn 300,000 CFA. However, many times people work with other types of contracts in teaching and earn considerably less than these estimates.

Apart from a former employee called Mr. Peter and the project writer, employees did not know how any of the bushfelling programmes functioned. The two ever-changing female secretaries typed out occasional word documents, photocopied documents, ordered files and welcomed by-passers. Their workload was not heavy. They mostly sat in the office waiting for things to happen.

The project manager of INACOD wrote, without any visible success, project proposals that were supposed to attract funding for community development projects. The public relations manager arranged meetings at and with secondary schools. The two educational advisors were the most informed about the actual shape and form of bushfelling programmes. They would name price and destination, yet would know how these lines were actually operating. While motivated to send their own members of family out, they would not even know when a particular line had just failed.

It seemed that the misinformation of employees at the office is not a coincidence. A good employee was characterized by not challenging the monopoly of knowledge of the migration broker himself. Mr. James protected his status and the security of the programmes by carrying out most of the work himself. His employees had more of a representative function in the office, carried out publicity work and reinforced the status and level of a migration broker.

Mr. Peter was one of the few members of staff actually in a position to inform and make arrangements with clients. Mr. Peter is a South Westerner in his late 20s from a polygamous family and had struggled during his studies because had not received sufficient financial support from his parents.<sup>16</sup> With a university degree from a Francophone university, Mr. Peter is bilingual and well qualified. Yet, he survived only with various small posts at different schools, as well as with the hours that he can work for Mr. James at INACOD.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Peter twice applied for a visa with the American Embassy and had been turned down both times. A few years after having been swindled in an attempt to fall bush,<sup>18</sup> Mr. Peter found employment with Mr. James. He was one of the first employees who, in my research on migration brokerage, was actually able to inform me about the way in which some of the lines were operating. He was the first employee I had come across that understood what was happening at the agency. Then he disappeared. From one day to the other, he was no longer to be found in the office.

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<sup>16</sup> His father had sent out his half-brother to bush. At the point of research, the family had not had any news from the half-brother for more than ten years. His father was married to several women and it was not Mr. Peter's mother who had given birth to the child that his father had sent out to bush. Mr. Peter thus blamed the failure of this bushfelling project in generating financial security for the family back in Cameroon on the polygamous nature of his father's family. The experience of having a half-brother in bush that never sent back money did nothing to change his fundamental belief in the possibility of bush a tout prix.

<sup>17</sup> Mr. Peter worked as a discipline master, as well as a biology teacher at different secondary schools in Buea. He was not a civil servant.

<sup>18</sup> He had received an email about a conference in the U.S. The flight was going to be free. The only condition was to mobilize another four people who were also to attend the conference with him. The registration fee for the conference was 250,000 CFA. The four young men hesitated when the bank account for the conference was located in Guinea-Bissau, yet, tried their luck. The day after the transfer the e-mail address was blocked. No further communication with the conference conveners was possible.

I had conducted an extended interview with Mr. Peter before his disappearance. When asked what he would do if he was given 2.5 million CFA, he said that would be just the money that it would take to establish himself with a different kind of bushfalling line. Instead of using the money to fall bush, he would set up a new line to make other people fall bush. There is money in bushfalling and Mr. Peter was well aware of it.

After a period of silence, the director finally explained Mr. Peter's disappearance. Mr. Peter had used the public face of INACOD to recruit clients, take money and then put them on separate bushfalling lines – lines that Mr. James did not know about. The whole affair flew up when the partners of Mr. Peter failed him and his clients returned to the office of Mr. James to complain. Hence from one day to the other, Mr. Peter was no longer working in the office. He had been fired.

Yet, Mr. Peter had taken his experience and exposure to INACOD with him. A few weeks later, Delphine and I found a poster on the outskirts of Buea advertising a new bushfalling programme. No names were mentioned on the poster, so Delphine and I set out to explore who was the new broker in town. We ask a friend of Delphine to call and see this new broker and found that it was Mr. Peter. It appeared that he had his own contact people and had advertised a line to Dubai, as well as for studies to Scandinavia. He took his capital to try to set up his own business.

Mr. Peter's success would depend on his capacity to convince his clients that he had real connections to bush that make his lines feasible. If this failed, he would be considered a doki man who could help out, but not strong enough to guarantee access. This case illustrates well why it was so crucial for both Mr. James and Mr. Walter never to share their business secrets with their employees. Only one big man can manage bushfalling. Information is money and it needs to be managed and protected. Sharing information and the multiple levels of mediation put the services of migration brokers at risk. INACOD had to be closed because Mr. James trusted one employee.

While shocking and certainly of dramatic consequences for the families of the aspiring migrants who had given money to this programme, closures and failures were common. Given that bushfalling is inherently risky, the (temporary) closing of a programme, a line or even an office is in certain ways always anticipated or considered possible. As seen in the preceding chapter, its various causes were not easily distinguished.

Before Mr. James set up his NGO, the office had already been connected to bushfalling. Another NGO called 'Universal Link' had sold migration broker services for which the owner was also sent to prison for charges of duping. People in the neighbourhood still remembered 'Universal Link', but when Mr. James arrived, there was no problem for him to set up INACOD in the very same office.

When I asked my new research assistant to explore what people in the neighbourhood knew about the closing down of INACOD, the stories varied greatly. Some accused Mr. James of being a feyman. Others pitied him for having been duped. In spite of the closure of INACOD, the success cases of the people that Mr. James did manage to send out before his failure continue to shine and carry importance. While fully aware of his limits and failures, the female employee who taught at the



University of Buea was still grateful to Mr. James for making her brother a bush-faller in Dubai. However shocking and dramatic the consequences of failure are to the families that lost money in the Canada affair that brought about the closing down of INACOD, people in Buea also knew about those who successfully became bushfaller families thanks to the help and support of Mr. James.

My former research assistant's friend also discovered that the project writer was able to continue his work as a migration broker even without the office of INACOD. He boasted to my assistant to have sent out four people to Canada. It thus seems that an analysis of the limits of migration brokers cannot be limited to questions of illegality, naïve trust and criminal intentions. A demand for migration brokerage exists, as well as continued credibility even for brokers who were involved in prior failures. I will in the following sub-section look at the credibility of migration brokers as stake-holders within the economy of emigration by considering their connections to instances of stateness.

### ***Credibility and the realm of the official***

During fieldwork, I was surprised to find that Mr. Walter and Mr. James both referred to aspiring migrants as applicants. When aspiring migrants came to both INACOD and AALC, they had to pay a fee to open a file for their registration. In both examples, migration broker offices seemed to take on the role and function of officials. Consequently, when aspiring migrants evaluated the quality of travel documents, they did not necessarily consider distinctions between state and non-state mediation as the most relevant or even apparent criteria.

I will explore how migration brokers resemble and connect to state officials by exploring how INACOD, before its closedown, was positioned vis-à-vis state institutions. The fieldwork material directed my attention towards a sphere of shared cultural and symbolic repertoires that stretched and covered separate spheres of the market and the state.<sup>19</sup> At a concrete level of personal connections, one can think of relations between migration brokers and state officials in terms of opposition, collaboration, connivance or resistance, however, my goal is to understand 'cultural framings of beliefs about the operation of legitimate power' (Pitcher, Moran & Johnston 2009: 149).

Migration brokers and state officials both belong to a realm of the official. I do not presuppose at a normative level that official means respectable and legal. Hibou (1999:80) points out that:

*the [very] division into formal and informal spheres is [...] not a useful distinction since illegal practices are also performed in the formal sector, while so-called informal economic networks operate with well-established hierarchies and are fully integrated into social life.*

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<sup>19</sup> This argument does not foreclose that big men also rival the bureaucratic elite's display of grandeur and notability (Ndjio 2006: 132).

Instead, I explore at a descriptive level how my informants conceive and construct the legitimacy of power.

In line with his rhetoric on counselling, Mr. James had set up what he called 'educational guidance and career advice'. Throughout the year that I was present at his office, he managed to enter into more official partnerships with educational institutions and authorities, such as various secondary schools, professional training schools and the educational secretaries of various churches. The official partnership agreements were formalised on paper stating that INACOD staff would provide career counselling and educational orientation at secondary schools, as well as help professional schools to recruit new students from the former. The equation is a brilliant one. Secondary schools are grateful for their students to receive information and guidance. INACOD had financial revenues through its placement of students with professional schools. When his friend from the University of Portsmouth visited in Cameroon, Mr. James used the opportunity to visit his partner schools all over the region, to distribute flyers from the University of Portsmouth and to demonstrate to a wide audience how broad and well founded his international connections were.

For the longest of times, I avoided the repeated and insistent wishes of Mr. James for me to participate in these educational guidance activities. I did not want to proactively legitimise his authority and validate his great claims at having all these international partners. Delphine in particular, but even my host mother never shared my reticence. In the course of the year, we had discussed how I would go about writing a sample C.V. or a letter of motivation, or how I would use the Internet to search for internship possibilities or scholarship possibilities. Delphine argued that she had never heard about writing C.V.'s before and insisted that I accept to lecture on this subject. I thus talked for some 5- 10 minutes at the launching of the educational guidance programme at one of the secondary schools in Buea.<sup>20</sup>

The official launch was part of the school's morning assembly. The school children respectfully saluted me, and men from INACOD dressed in suits attended the assembly hall. After the prayers and the national anthem, several speeches were made by INACOD staff, the principal of the school, but also by a representative from the provincial delegation for education. State authorities officially recognized INACOD's educational guidance activities and Delphine argued that she considered it highly likely that with time the ministry was going to finance parts of these orientation programmes.

After my small informative talk about the way in which a C.V. functions, Mr. James launched himself into a speech about the INACOD family. He talked about the present situation of Cameroon and the future of the country. 'Everybody wants to be a bushfaller because our country does not provide the opportunities that we want.' 'There are many chances out there,' he explained to the students at the Assembly.

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<sup>20</sup> I tried to give some basic advice about how a C.V. ought to be written. I encouraged extra-curricular activities and internships.

INACOD is there to give assistance to people to go there. Their talents die here in Cameroon. Opportunities could be created in Cameroon, too, but there is a need for young people to be informed about educational possibilities and professional openings. Hence, INACOD has launched a programme in which it will give monthly talks and presentations at different secondary schools. 'We're here to give you information.

Mr. James described his foreign partner universities at the end of his talk. He closed the session by inviting the students to come and visit INACOD for advice on education. Mr. James marked out a position for his agency that responded to a spectacularly well-balanced set of demands and pressures. With the fate of the country at heart, the INACOD family nevertheless has a superb advertisement possibility for its financially more rewarding bushfalling lines for both studies and work.

The various partnerships that Mr. James had been able to arrange prove that his vision of himself as a big man who works for community development in co-operation with other important partners is not mere propaganda. Concerning his connections to instances of stateness, Mr. James also offered to process urgent passports. He had connections with doki people in town, as well as with police officials. For a given fee, he could deliver passports much faster than the usual route. Going through Mr. James had the advantage of a higher guarantee and more security than through other less established brokers, facilitators or mediators.

Finally, in view of his new role for the fight against unemployment, Mr. James had also taken up contact with the National Employment Fund in Cameroon. The Dubai programme offered attractive working contracts to a series of welders and nurses from Cameroon. Mr. James informed me shortly after the opening of these Dubai programmes that the National Employment Fund would be paying half of the salary of the staff of his offices. With this step, he had come a long way towards his ambitions. In addition to more financial success than during his years of repairing refrigerators or working for the German NGO, he received official recognition for his role and position within society. Where the government and state institutions lacked the authority to assist the community and bring along development, Mr. James had filled the gap and responded to the needs of the market.

The above discussion of his actual partnerships and connections to instances of stateness help to explain why Pamella's father referred to Mr. James as a director of a department. In the way in which Mr. James ran his development agency that equally functioned as a travel agency and as an educational institution, we see a creative mix of relational dynamics to state authorities in Cameroon and abroad. While almost emulating and fulfilling through his travel agency educational and developmental ambitions, Mr. James simultaneously worked through the services of other broker and mediators in the acquisition of passports or residence papers. However, he so strongly considered his real colleagues to be the educational secretaries of churches and people within the ministries that he would have been offended had I dared to compare him with doki-people.

Above I have illustrated personal connections between migration brokers and state actors, as well as similar functions, structures and cultural repertoires between migration brokers and form of stateness. Police offices, embassies and migration

broker were all involved within the production and delivery of travel permits and fulfilled similar functions. Migration brokers referred to their clients as 'applicants' and ran offices in which they open 'files'. Having in this section discussed connections and communalities between migration brokers and instances of stateness, I will in the following section go on to ask when and how state-enforceable laws can pose a limit to the work of migration brokers.

### **'They can send him back?' Exploring the limits of the law**

During fieldwork, Mr. Walter would always come and go. For a few months, he would be in China only to reappear all of a sudden. His movements were never entirely certain. He could disappear and arrive at any moment. After a few months of absence, we suddenly saw him again in town. Delphine and I went to his office and we would chat. He leisurely told us that he had been deported and showed us the cancelled visa for China in his passport and a sticker that he had been removed.

Delphine and I were both surprised – but for different reasons. I was surprised at how relaxed Mr. Walter stayed in the face of deportation. He did not indicate any concern at all for the future of his brokerage work. Delphine was surprised that it was possible for Mr. Walter to even be deported in the first place. Mr. Walter's role as a patron conferred the status of children to his clients. In this role, he took care his clients. Delphine was surprised that there should be a limit to Mr. Walter's power. 'A man who can send people (children) out to bush, they can still send him back???' After all, he was somebody who month after month turns people into bushfallers.

In this section, the focus is on Delphine's legal imaginary of Mr. Walter's supposed position vis-à-vis the state and its legal frameworks. In light of studies in legal consciousness on the ways law is experienced and understood, this section explores why and how Delphine's utter disbelief at the deportation of a migration broker as powerful as Mr. Walter makes sense. Through this analysis, I also suggest that law is constituted by these experiences and beliefs, as much as by its textual foundations.

This section first looks at relations between Mr. Walter and his employees and then at the personal development of Mr. Walter. Management of information and the tracing of connections are important in understanding the nature of Mr. Walter's authority, as well as his position towards state authority. Through the case study of Mr. Walter, the final section of this chapter explores the limits of the law for the credibility of a migration broker in a place of departure.

### ***Mr. Walter and his employees***

Eight months after the end of fieldwork, I received news that Mr. Walter was no longer in Cameroon. During a later visit to Cameroon in July 2010, his former secretary Delma complained to me that Mr. Walter had 'left and abandoned' her without saying goodbye. Delma explained that she received death threats when clients in Cameroon noticed that Mr. Walter was not to return. She was even imprisoned for a few days. Mr. Walter's lawyer helped her get out of prison, but the money that Mr. Walter sent was not sufficient. Delma had to add her own savings to get out of prison. Delma complained how Mr. Walter 'suffered people all over the place.' Besides having abandoned his clients, he also failed to pay out the remaining salary to Delma. According to Delma, it was not Mr. Walter himself, but a relative of Mr. Walter's wife who ensured that the mother of Mr. Walter's children could leave the country. She is now pursuing an MA degree (incidentally in migration studies) in Sweden. The children are with relatives of Mr. Walter in Yaoundé.<sup>21</sup>

These new events seemed to call into question the credibility of Mr. Walter as a migration broker. Yet, as we have seen in the case of Mr. James, the credibility of a migration broker could extend beyond temporary failure of travel projects. The same held true for Mr. Walter, who had already experienced a massive crisis with bushfalling programmes a few years before my arrival in Cameroon. He had not been imprisoned like Mr. James, but had had to take refuge in the capital of Yaoundé due to threats of clients in Buea. His church had excluded him from membership because they accused him of accumulating money through means that were not comprehensible and doing business that was not straight. However, despite this prior failure, Mr. Walter managed to return to Buea and to re-establish himself as a migration broker with the agency called AALC. The closing down of an office is thus not necessarily the end of the ambitions or credentials of a migration broker.

Mr. Walter's office consisted of two small rooms, decorated amply with photo material from China. As part of a new dynamic move within his agency, Mr. Walter later ordered Versailles style curtains to be placed as decoration along the ceiling. Despite the dysfunctional water toilet, Mr. Walter was clearly trying to give his office an air of importance and prestige. A photo of Mr. Walter with the Chinese Ambassador in Yaoundé hung on the wall.

His two employees, Delma and Johnson generally occupied the front room. Johnson used most of his time giving computer classes to his private students. He was paid 45,000 CFA and occasionally scanned documents and printed out application forms. Delma earned about 60,000 – 70,000 CFA. In the morning and in the evening she came to open and close the office. For the rest of the time, she kept herself busy with small talk over the latest videos, gossip about university students and her church activities on Sundays. She had been Mr. Walter's faithful companion for the longest of time. She knew approximately where to and for what prices Mr. Walter sent his clients out. When it came to any question outside this fixed

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<sup>21</sup> I was able to confirm the information about Mr. Walter's wife through a chain of networks of Cameroonian bushfallers in Sweden.

framework, she always sweetly and kindly replied that she did not know. 'You have to ask boss for that.'

Her lack of curiosity and independent enquiry made her so valuable to the boss. She was the only one whom he trusted to carry and transport large sums of money for him. However, strange men knocked on the door of her one room apartment to claim some of the money. Nothing further happened and with a little bit of extra care, the business and work of Mr. Walter continued just as usual.

Beyond the front room in which Delma and Johnson sat during office hours was an official reception room. If ever Mr. Walter actually was present actually in his office, he received his clients in this area explaining the programmes, took the money and handed out the visas. I was able to follow many a conversation between him and potential, current, former clients. Yet, most of the time, I waited in vain for things to actually happen. The reception room was mostly empty. Mr. Walter was a mobile man.

At times, we would bump into each other at the cyber café opposite his office or in the computer room of the university. Despite all his profits, Mr. Walter somehow never bothered to install Internet in his own office. On such occasions, he would tell me about some of his most recent lines, actions, and programmes. He was busy reserving online flights for clients in China to go to Thailand to renew their visas there. He made hotel reservations. He met with contact people. He researched immigration rules and regulations. Everything occurred on the phone and over the Internet.

Although Mr. Walter sent people to Belgium, he did not openly advertise this line. He was ambiguous about his lines for Europe. At first, he proclaimed that he 'only proceeds in countries where we have 100 percent success. For Europe our links are not so direct.' Yet, later he opened up and explained that 'there is a twist to Belgium.' He could process a person for China and then arrange for people in Brussels who helped his clients out of the airport and into the Schengen area. Mr. Walter often complained to me that what he could safely and securely offer in terms of his bushfaling lines was mostly not what his clients actually wanted. Visa regulations for China were not as stringent as within the Schengen area. His contacts at the Chinese Embassy in Yaoundé were solid.

Mr. Walter referred to the people sent out as applicants. The aspiring migrants applied with him for a programme or a visa for a specific country – just as they would apply at an Embassy. Certain elements in the way in which Mr. Walter's office functioned, resembled the cultural and symbolic repertoires of state institutions, such as Embassies. Mr. Walter often walked around with several Cameroonian passports of his clients in his blazer jacket. When clients registered with either Mr. Walter or Mr. James, they paid a fee and delivered their passport to the respective broker.

Mr Walter, in particular, liked to play and show off these passports. He often took out the passports and showed us the visas inside. Mr. Walter showed off his powers by waving a whole handful of passports through the air. The production of papers that work is associated with power. Only powerful people can produce papers that work. Yet, papers here are only part of the picture. Already stated when

describing Mr James, Mr. Walter, too, relied heavily on state connections and information management in the way he established himself as a broker.

### ***Mr. Walter's personal trajectory***

Mr. Walter was able to conduct much of his work because he was a graduate of an elitist school attended by student that later become state officials. Originally from Mamfe in the South West Province, Mr. Walter began his career as a mathematics student. Many former classmates of Mr. Walters were among the political elite of the country or within the military. Even while at school, his dynamic personality helped him mediate positions with bureaucrats and political figureheads for his fellow graduates. Without such mediation graduates may not have found employment as civil servants. Mediation is deeply built into the functioning of the Cameroonian state system (Bayart et al. 1999; 2009).

Mr. Walter did work for a few years as a mathematics teacher. The financial status of a teacher in Cameroon is modest and salaries of civil servants are often paid on an irregular basis. It is in this context that Mr. Walter tried to fall bush, but the British Embassy refused his visa. The Chinese Embassy was less stringent and he set off to establish trading activities between China and Cameroon. From there, it was but a small step to offer his insights of life in bush to also help others – against a fee – to come to China. Mr. Walter did so in the form of an NGO and then sought to expand his networks to other areas of the world.

Both the demand for emigration and the desire for others to commercially facilitate emigration are born out of the fact that, in Cameroon, there is little opportunity for success. Migration brokers and clients are not to be conceptualised as people who find themselves in opposition to one another. To the contrary, both broker and client share similarly difficult starting position and, in a certain way, can be said to form part of the same economy of the margins. Brokers have either already been able to overcome their marginality, or they are in possession of knowledge, skills or connections that can contain the potential of achieving inclusion into the territory of another state. Even failed emigration attempts can be the source of authority. After three unsuccessful visits to the American Embassy to apply for a visa, a friend of mine is now using her cyber café as a platform to help others – for a fee – to fill in visa application forms and do the online bookings for visa interviews.

Mr. Walter's days as a mathematics teacher are long behind him. He is the boss that does powerful businesses all over the world. He has in the meantime travelled widely. One day, he flicked through his passport that was full of visas for Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia.

As Mr. Walter drove Delphine, his wife and me out from the small compound where his NGO is situated, a former colleague of his approached the car. In contrast to Mr. Walter's – who was well dressed, strongly-built and equipped with a very fancy mobile phone— the former colleague's car appeared thin and grey on the outside. He was begging Mr. Walter openly on the street for a small loan with

which to set up a trading activity with China. He was begging Mr. Walter for help, but Mr. Walter was sceptical. He had little time to spare. The colleague was sent away and Mr. Walter openly declared that he is not interested in this kind of collaboration. Mr. Walter continued to explain to us his great ideas and future plans for success. The former colleague was left behind.

Observing this scene, I was struck by the contrast between the colleague who was pleading at the car window and Mr. Walter who was elevated on his car seat. The most prevalent practice that generates values in contemporary Cameroon is bush and Mr. Walter was an authority that knew how to operate within this world. In contemporary Cameroon, feymen and nouveaux riches are affluent enough to provide financial assistance to the Cameroonian government and other state institutions (Ndjio 2006 a: 1). In this context, big men like Mr. Walter are admired and respected for more than just their wealth.

Mr. Walter was a credible migration broker also because he maintained former connections to state officials. Mr. Walter contemplated taking up an administrative post within the local ministerial authority on education. This would place him well for some of his other bushfalling and business ideas. As a big man, Mr. Walter could capitalize upon state functions. With no intention of going back to teaching, Mr. Walter told me that he had nevertheless succeeded in maintaining on paper his former post, as well as the salary that goes with the post. He was a flexible and savvy businessman who knew within which margins to place himself.

Mr. Walter told me repeatedly that he considered himself safe with respect to state authorities in Cameroon. Through listening to his phone conversations, I knew that Mr. Walter was also sending out the children of military personnel he knew from his days in Yaoundé. He had enough connections at that school to be able, as he put it, 'not to get into trouble', if ever he were put on trial in court for the case of a particular client. Sometimes in his narrations, he talked to me about having come back from a court. His narratives were always one of victory. When telling me about having had to go to court, he praised either the power of his rhetoric or the strength of his connections that had ended the trial.

Mr. Walter acknowledged his deportation in the following terms: 'When the law catches you, then it's like judgment day. There is no point of return.' Mr. Walter was not obliged to tell Delphine and me about his deportation. Yet, he willingly and openly did so and even proceeded to show me his passport with the cancelled Chinese visa. The relaxed and even slightly amused tone in which Mr. Walter told us about his deportation suggested that in many ways he did consider himself too much of a big man to be threatened by the event of deportation. It constitutes for him just another challenge within the many challenges with which he was working on a daily basis to generate visas and travel permits for his clients.

Despite Mr. Walter's involuntary return to Cameroon, his deportation had little impact on his brokerage activities and no impact on his status and standing in Buea. His connections to people at the Chinese Embassy in Yaoundé had not been damaged. Visas continued to appear on the passports of his applicants. As for his own capacity to travel, he informed me that he was going to purchase a Ghanaian



passport and continue his journeys as a Ghanaian. I do not know whether this is what he did, but he certainly was able to continue his travels.

He explained that his deportation was a 'sacrifice'. Apparently, one of his clients had gotten himself involved with fraud at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and other clients of Mr. Walter were at danger of deportation. To prevent this, Mr. Walter proudly tells us that he 'sacrificed' himself - not unlike Jesus - and 'volunteered' to be deported himself. He explained that he was powerful enough to be able to travel any time with another passport or under another name. He wanted us to believe that he 'saved' the others who could safely remain in China. Regardless of what actually had led to Mr. Walter's deportation, with this narrative he was able to turn his forced return into an event that revealed his true powers.

In this sense, Mr. Walter's deportation further revealed how powerful a patron he was. The week after Mr. Walter's forced return from China, I encountered a severely worried mother of one of the Cameroonians in China. Due to the Olympic Games that summer, many working visas of immigrants in China were not renewed. This severely affected the clients of Mr. Walter. He rented a set of apartments where he gathered his clients so that they would not risk being picked up by the police. Yet, it seemed that they had little money left and were afraid to go out in fear of deportation by Chinese state authorities. The mother of one of these young Cameroonians was literally crying because she was worried whether her daughter even had food to eat. She had tried to send her money, but Western Union apparently could not send money to China. Here, too, Mr. Walter was the saviour in need. 'With one phone call, I can send the money.' The crying mother gave him money and he promised to wire it to her daughter in China. His credibility was re-established and the cause of the suffering of the woman's daughter was not associated with Mr. Walter's personal wrong-doings. The credibility of Mr. Walter's work was beyond questions of legal or illegal.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to develop an alternative way to conceptualise the credibility of migration brokers – not in terms of the supposed legal or illegal nature of their work, but in terms of locally operated distinctions between dokimen, feymen and big men. Throughout this chapter, a discussion of the emergence of several migration brokers has revealed the importance of information, connections, and papers as sources of credibility. All three constitute value scales and assets that can enable access to bush. Starting from emic terminology, this chapter has proposed an evaluation scale of the powers of migration brokers that is very different from the one of smuggling and trafficking.

In the first section, I demonstrated how travel documents from migration brokers are considered within a continuity of forms of paper production that stretch

across different actors, but not necessarily fundamentally different spheres. The experience of paper in a Cameroonian context of stateness shapes expectations and perceptions of the potential power and credibility of migration brokers. Therefore, the credibility of travel documents is evaluated in terms of their function (Bakewell 2007) and powers, rather than their locations and origins.

Building on these findings, the third section established that the fall and failure of a migration broker is not considered in relation to the law either. Migration brokers are both personally and symbolically connected to state officials. As such, analysis shows that migration brokers base their capacity, as well as their legitimacy, on connections to instances of stateness, as well as its cultural repertoires.

Shown in the fourth and final section of this chapter was that the credibility of migration brokers are not at danger even when migration brokers are directly and personally confronted with an event in which their own papers are classified as illegal. After his deportation, Mr. Walter continued to be able to operate and make other people leave the country.

It is striking that mediation even within and between agencies is an enormous field of activity much wider than the mere relation between one broker and one client is. What I studied was only the tip of the iceberg. Mr. James and Mr. Walter's offices are in many ways merely public interfaces. In both offices, the visible staff is not all the main power on which the success of the enterprise relies to any significant degree. Behind these big men there are other brokers and mediators. Migration broker offices are public. Yet, migration brokers are likely to be conceptualised as private actors.

In the analysis of this chapter, it was shown that aspiring migrants do not always distinguish between state and non-state mediation. Boundaries between state and market hold neither ethnographically, nor conceptually. An exploration of how the terminology of *dokimen*, *feymen* and *big men* is used in relation to practices of paper production in Anglophone Cameroon points us towards the limits not only of distinctions between legal and illegal, but also of the distinction between forms of paper production within the realm of the state and migration brokers and their supposed boundaries.

Aspiring migrants in Cameroon do not perceive of migration brokers as working against state actors. For big men, access to public institutions is important and is perceived of as an important means for (personal) enrichment (Daloze 2005: 163). Mr. James collaborated with educational state agencies, as well as with the National Employment Fund. Furthermore, Mr. James held a title in his village of origin. Mr. James skillfully built up his authority through a combination of what might be termed old and new types of authority (Daloze 2002: 278), while equally using money from his agency to finance career counseling.

This is why I have suggested analysing the way that migration brokerages relate to instances of stateness in terms of productive overlaps. The two migration brokers I research were holding positions of authority and trust. Both were operating through offices and were engaged within the business of bureaucracy. In this chapter, I have shown that while state officials seek to monopolise the legitimate

means of mobility (Torpey 2000), migration brokers seek to control – and preferably monopolise — information and connections.

These insights help to explain why one of Mr. James' claims to be fighting illegal migration is credible in the Cameroonian context. Mr. James is himself perceived as an authority figure that does not simply mirror cultural repertoires of stateness, but also functions in similar ways. Migration brokers and state officials are connected. Besides personal connections, they also share symbolic and cultural repertoires. Besides calling aspiring migrants 'applicants', opening 'files' for them, opening up 'offices' and employing 'secretaries', Mr. James produced and issued forms of documentation that allowed people to travel.

In Cameroon, migration brokers are credible authorities because aspiring migrants evaluate migration brokerage less in relation to locations of paper production and more in terms of the efficiency of travel documents. Having in this chapter analysed the limits of migration brokers in terms of both efficiency and credibility, the following chapter will explore how the law constructs locations of paper production as separate.

## CHAPTER 3

### Legality, luck and technologies of mediation: What does it take to get a visa?



9. Bar near Douala: 'Ambassade'

During an open day at the U.S. consulate service in Yaoundé, the consul in chief explained to the journalists present that 'applying for a visa is a straightforward and transparent process.' He furthermore stated that 'answering application and interview questions completely and candidly [would] allow [them] to give [applicants] the maximum benefit under the law, and help [them to] process [their] case quickly.' The press conference was an opportunity – as the consul in chief put it – to 'explain the law.'

While referring to the law, the consul himself also drew on notions commonly associated with market dynamics. The consul in chief referred to the 'business' of implementing and applying the law. He proclaimed that his consulate service 'provide[d] excellent customer service.' His statements reflect a belief in the market as a place of fairness and transparency. In his mind, business did not seem to contradict his simultaneous claim that the law guides visa application processes.

During the open day, the consulate service also showed a video usually viewed in the waiting room where applicants sit before their visa interview. The video con-

veyed how Cameroonian policemen arrest visa applicants involved with fraud. The consulate officer in chief used the term *dokimen* in his talk following the video. The video drove home the point of the criminality of migration brokers. In the perspective of embassy staff, brokers and intermediaries are obstructions to the otherwise 'transparent' process of the application of the law within their decision-making processes. The core message of the entire open day was that applicants should not seek out the advice or support of third parties.

Visa officials take great lengths to explain how the law guides application procedures. A great deal of energy was spent during the open day on condemning mediation. According to embassy staff, mediation is commercial and necessarily external to the embassy. In contrast to the narrative of legality, my informants viewed visa application processes in terms of luck. Upon arrival in bush, Delphine's position on bush at all cost changed in many ways. Yet her position, on what it takes to get a visa always remained the same: 'If you are lucky, you will have the visa. If you are not lucky, you will not have it.'

In asking a male informant on his thoughts about what he thinks of visas, he answered that visas are a question of origin and of luck. The question of origin refers to the virtual impossibility for many Cameroonians to get a visa.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to citizens of the European Union or the U.S., people with a Cameroonian passport have to engage with the regulatory regime of embassies on terms that make legal migration difficult, troublesome and sometimes impossible. As another informant of mine put it: 'We are only taking the one month visa because the one that you really need, they will not give us.'

Most notably, I remember travelling in a taxi called 'le sans visa'. Whenever I heard about overland migration without visas, it was by taxi drivers who had returned from the ordeal. Precisely because not everyone can have a visa, these travel permits inspire many strong narratives and beliefs. A man, who had called his tailor shop 'passport couture', told me that he wanted to assure the clientele of his shop that his products were of high quality, but also that wearing his clothes would bring his customers luck and success. Passports speak of international quality and visas of the potential for mobility. A visa in the passport elevates one to a higher status and can potentially improve the prospects of an entire family.

The despair and frustration of those whose possibility for mobility had been blocked was always present. In the perceptions of many aspiring migrants, embassies are places of danger and incertitude. Whether or not a visa will be granted is largely unpredictable and yet for many of crucial importance for their lives. Delphine expressed the uncertainty of visa application processes to me in these terms:

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<sup>1</sup> While legal forms of mobility are much more accessible to the privileged upper classes of Cameroonian society, procedures are nevertheless somewhat tedious for everyone. To attain the visas to European countries that do not have embassies in Cameroon (like for example Ireland), Cameroonians have to travel all the way to Nigeria. The regulatory requirements are so challenging that it often requires several trips to the capital in Yaoundé before a visa is actually given. Narratives of university colleagues that have had to undergo serious challenges and stern scrutiny of their travel permits when passing through various European airports are abundant. Even Cameroonians who have completed entire university degrees in Europe will be challenged at airports and hindered in travel projects through complicated regulatory procedures. The economy of passport regimes is such that the holder of a Cameroonian passport needs more patience and greater administrative skills to succeed in travelling through legal channels than other nationals.

*You cannot know what the embassy people want because even if you have everything and meet all the requirements, it is no guarantee.' [...] Sometimes you can have all the things needed, but you will not have the visa. There are people, like some lecturers, who have been coming and going, coming and going, but sometimes they go and there are still complications to have the visa.*

A staff at the U.S. consulate service informally gave me estimates that 10 out of 50 applications for non-immigrant visas were accepted.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. consulate service, did not communicate their reasons for refusals for non-immigrant visas. The reasons and causes of application outcomes remain opaque for applicants. Even informants that regularly travel and do not have to fear a visa refusal would repeatedly laugh with me about the arbitrary nature of visa decisions:

*'Are the embassy people stupid? What do they train in? They let through people with fake papers and they stop those whose papers are genuine.'*

In this chapter, I question what it takes to get a visa. I compare conceptions of travel permits and money flows in exchange for travel permits among aspiring migrants and state officials. I shall place narratives of luck and legality in relation to mobility regimes - or in keeping with the theoretical framework of this dissertation - the regulation of emigration.

The research on the internal dynamics within Embassies is based on two weeks of observation at the French Embassy and one week of observation at the U.S. Embassy. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on an analysis of the U.S. consulate service. The following chapter is dedicated to the French consulate service. Whilst the German and Dutch Embassy did not allow me access because of 'privacy issues', the French and U.S. Embassy welcomed the research with the unspoken idea that this also provided a chance to clean themselves of undue allegations.<sup>3</sup>

My research project also represented an opportunity for both consulate services to explain the difficulties of their work and to show how prior reforms have tried to improve the quality of the services provided to Cameroonian visa applicants.

After a short theoretical discussion of state regimes of mobility control, I will begin with an analysis of how luck and mediation are related to one another from the perspective of aspiring migrants. I will do so by tracing how Delphine acquired a passport, a visa and finally left Cameroon. I will then move to discuss connections of mediation from the perspective of consulate staff members at the U.S. consulate in Yaoundé. I will close the chapter with an analysis of financial flows within consulate sections.

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<sup>2</sup> For applicants applying for visas for university studies, success rates seem to be better. According to an estimate of the consulate officer, applicants had almost a 50 percent success rates. On the other hand, he complained that student visa applications were the ones that contained the most fraudulent documents.

<sup>3</sup> I was able to gain access to the U.S. Embassy through a chain of personal contacts that had had their initial starting point in an acting group of which I was part in Amsterdam. As pointed out in the introduction, my access to the French Embassy was also facilitated by my alumni status as a graduate of Sciences Po Paris. Most Embassy staff within the French system would have passed through that school. I was thus easily credible as a potential 'colleague'.

### *Visas, legality and technologies of mediation*

At the beginning of fieldwork, I showed my passport to Delphine. She was severely shocked and almost outraged: 'This small thing – people die for this small thing? You put a stamp and then you can go?'<sup>4</sup> Delphine was surprised to see the size and appearance of my Cameroonian visa. She was shocked that a mere stamp could grant a person the permission to travel.

Although airports and Embassies are places that fundamentally facilitate the ability to travel, the focus in public and academic debate is often on those cases in which travel is supposed to be illegitimate and needs to be stopped through the denial of a visa. As Salter puts it, 'While the characteristics of the globalised world make movement necessary – in addition to desirable— the structure of the global mobility regime reinforces the act of crossing the frontier as an exceptional act' (2006: 174). Yet, people that want to be mobile have not always needed pieces of paper from state authorities to have permission to move.<sup>5</sup> According to Torpey, the rights of states to control the entry of people into their territory has, historically speaking, only gained its quintessential importance in the course of the twentieth century (2000: 159).

This chapter discusses strategies of both applicants and state officials to mediate, influence and control the outcomes of visa application procedures. Embassy staff feels legitimated to denounce the fraudulent practices of migration brokers. Yet, contrasting perspectives from aspiring migrants help to unravel underlying assumptions of their understanding of legality (Silbey 2005; McCann 2008). I use the notion of technologies of mediation to go beyond the opposition between state officials and migration brokers. With mediation, I mean to the acts and factors that intervene for the purpose of bringing about a result.<sup>6</sup>

I have drawn from the specific usage of the terms mediation and brokerage by Olivier de Sardan. Writing about the field of development interventions, he discusses development agents (2005: 166–167) and development brokers (173–178) under the same umbrella of mediation. Tracing the origins of development brokers back to colonial times (166), he writes that 'any social process that brings localized low-level actors or groups into relationship with global structures (the town, the state or the market being the most obvious of these) requires the service of go-betweens or intermediaries who occupy a clearly strategic function' (173).

Aspiring migrants and consulate officers both draw on technologies of mediation to control uncertain outcomes and consequences of visa application processes. I have developed the notion of technologies of mediation in inspiration of the work of Torpey (2000; 1998), van der Pleog (1999), Simon (2009) and Rudnyckij (2004).

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4 'This small thing wey man fit die so? This small thing? You just stamp, then you fit go?'

5 During my fieldwork period in Cameroon, I have conducted several weeks of archival research in both Buea and Yaoundé. Through archival material, I traced historical precedents of travel permits in today's Anglophone Cameroon. Based on this material, I could trace how the invention of travel permits and their increasing standardization produced the need for ever-greater degrees of mediation. There was not enough space to include material on the historical production of illegality within this chapter. A separate article on this topic is in preparation.

6 For other usages of the term mediation, see (Eisenlohr 2011: 1).

I consider technologies in relation to governance (Salter 2006) and in the broadest meaning of the term (Rose, Malley & Valverde 2006). I thus consider not only fingerprinting and the storage of the photos of all visa applicants on computer systems as technologies, but also paper and interviews (Van der Ploeg, 1999: 297- 298).

While Cameroonians are very clear about needing mediation, embassy staff denies the existence of mediation within the walls of the consulate service. Yet, in practice, they are also using mediation. The narrative of legality hides these state practices of mediation. Instead of being exposed as acts of mediation, state practices of mediation are camouflaged - in the name of the law - through legitimizing expressions, such as transparency and neutrality. These discourses construct the supposedly disinterested, automatic and nonpolitical nature of state practices - which in fact are also practices of mediation.

I use the same notion of technologies of mediation to analyse both the strategies of consulate officers and aspiring migrants because I want to study the very construction of some mediating devices as commercial and others as transparent. I am thus able to conclude that at stake in the warnings against *dokimen* is not a call against mediation per se, but an attempt of embassies to strengthen the state's claim to the monopoly of legitimate mediation.

### **Travel permits, luck and mediation**

In Cameroon, visa application processes are understood in terms of one's luck. However, to interpret the probability of being granted a visa in terms of good and bad luck does not exclude the possibility for young Cameroonians to try to influence the probability of the outcomes of their visa application procedures. Aspiring migrants seek to influence the outcome of their visa application processes through prayer, migration brokers, advice, preparing well for the visa interview or the purchasing of forms of documentation for the application file.

Going from the Cameroonian immigration office (for the production of the passport) to the French or American Embassy (for the visa application), aspiring migrants have to deal with two different state cultures. In this section, I argue that understanding the process of engaging the Cameroonian state opens new paths for an analysis of the regulation of emigration and the respective role of migration brokers and embassies therein. The commonality and acceptability for Cameroonians to contact migrating brokers needs to be placed into a context where it is normal to refer to intermediaries also when accessing a passport. I shall study the experience of regulatory requirements for passports and visas through the prism of Delphine's own travel project.



*Delphine's passport: bridging the inside and the outside of institutional walls*

Although Delphine had always intended to go to bush, when she was applying for a scholarship abroad, she did not possess a passport. Passport applications are normally processed in the capitals of each respective province, cost 50,000 CFA and take – depending on the province – up to three months. Delphine, however, only had two weeks to get her passport in time for her scholarship deadline.

In panic, Delphine rushed to the immigration and emigration office of the police in Buea where she accidentally came across a friend who had a friend within the police in Yaoundé. Through this contact, Delphine planned to get what in Cameroon is commonly called an 'urgent passport'. The price was 150,000 CFA. Delphine hardly hesitated to pay the triple of the standard amount. When I tried to explore other solutions, Delphine told me: 'Anybody of my level and standing has to be like this. [...] I have to go.' It was in this manner that Delphine left me in a great rush to go to Yaoundé.

Under normal circumstances, most people's finances are too tight to pay for the acquisition of a passport – or even a renewal. School fees, house rent, death celebrations, family members in the village, business investments, Christmas clothing are the usual financial demands. Without a specific 'line' or 'opening' in view, most people would not have 50,000 CFA to 'dash to the government,' as an informant put it. Ordinarily, passport fees are considered an unnecessary 'gift' to the government. Yet, at the same time, bushfalling is deeply associated with extraordinary financial sacrifices and with speed. Partly because bushfalling is such a risky enterprise, the processing of necessary travel documents often happens with an extreme sense of urgency. Many of my informants expressed that through speed one could avoid 'blockages'. Delphine's willingness to spend triple for an 'urgent passport' reflects wider patterns. Given that connections and access to bush are an important asset, travel documents acquire a high-assumed value.

Even though the contact people of other friends confirmed that 150,000 CFA was indeed the current 'standard' price for 'urgent passports', I remained worried whether the contact people of her friend in Yaoundé would prove to be reliable. Stories of duping are common. I suggested contacting the scholarship foundation to explore whether they could accept to process the scholarship application with the scan of Delphine's identity card in the place of her pending passport. Delphine was skeptical and remained eager to rush to Yaoundé to process her papers. She did not want to put her travel project at risk. If a passport was required, she had to go to Yaoundé and pay the required money to attain an 'urgent passport'. Delphine did not see a scope for negotiation with the scholarship organisation. After all, one does not negotiate with Embassies about formalities either.

When her bus to Yaoundé broke down late at night, Delphine chose to hitchhike the rest of the journey. She would not take such risk under other circumstances. The day after, at the police station in Yaoundé, Delphine was immediately greeted with the question of whether she needed an 'ordinary' or an 'urgent' passport. Even if in the legal procedures of the police, there are no provisions for

accelerated passport procedures, 'urgent passports' are a common practice and Delphine was directly given this option. Preferential treatment – in exchange for money or facilitated through contacts – was common and even though 'urgent' passports do not officially exist within the legal regulations of the police, there is a 'standard' price for them.

Through her friend's help, Delphine was able to walk straight through to the office of an important commissioner at the police in Yaoundé. Distracted by other work, the commissioner did not ask Delphine for extra payment. Instead of the announced 150,000 CFA, Delphine only paid 60,000 CFA at the counter with another police man<sup>7</sup> and was then given a number with which she could come back two weeks later to pick up her passport.

Even through processing times were shorter in the capital than in the province, Delphine was not sure she would get hers in time. Two weeks later, Delphine and I travelled together back to Yaoundé. As we walked up to the 'Délégation de la Sûreté Nationale' (Delegation of National Security) to pick up Delphine's passport, we saw a crowd of men beside a wall just opposite the police. Some typing machines sat on the wall. For a small fee, forms could be filled in there. As we kept walking, I was asked whether I wanted any services. 'Would I like a passport?' In case I did not have a passport, this man offered to 'organise' one for me. In informal conversation, two other young men explained to us the kind of services that they could offer. A birth certificate is 20,000 CFA. A marriage certificate without legal registration is 40,000 CFA. A marriage certificate with legal registration is 450,000 CFA. A super-urgent passport delivered in but three days costs 250,000 CFA. A one-week urgent passport is 200,000 CFA.

In asking about their work, these men responded that they did everything that related to legal papers. In discussion with Delphine, I was struck how she barely made a distinction between the kinds of legal papers she could attain here in the courtyard outside the walls of the police compound or within the compound of the police. In her view of the intermediaries that we had come across, Delphine did not take seriously or as self-evident the wall that separated intermediaries inside the police compound from intermediaries outside the compound. For her, the credibility of intermediaries did not depend on their relative position vis-à-vis a state institution.

At the police station, we met a queue of people trying to retrieve their passports. On a wooden table in front of the building, we saw piles of passports with numbers written on them. Eventually it was Delphine's turn. 'Who told you that your passport was ready?'<sup>8</sup> The policeman angrily threw incomprehensible French at Delphine. With French only as a foreign language, Delphine did not understand the officer. Regardless of their proficiency, Anglophone Cameroonians must speak French in national state institutions. Even Francophone public servants fluent in English often agree to speak it only in exceptional cases. This linguistic challenge created another level of necessity for Anglophone Cameroonians to resort to in-

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7 This was the only money Delphine paid. She had not paid any money before in Buea.

8 My own translation

termediaries in their quest of passports or other types of documentation or state services. When spending a short amount of time observing application processes for identity cards and passports at the immigration office in Buea, I often came across cases in which applicants came with family members or friends to translate and mediate from Pidgin to either French or English.

Other people in the queue at the police station in Yaoundé kindly translated what the policeman said and explained that Delphine needed to go another place to retrieve a number for the retrieval of her passport. We followed the instructions, and crossed the yard and cut across another long queue. Still in the wrong place, those in other queues did not know how to help. A woman, who sold her at the police station each day, knew where we could look up the list with processed passports.

We reached an unpaved backyard behind one of the main office buildings. There, between 10 and 20 applicants (mostly young and predominantly male) went through A4 sheets of paper in search of their name and the retrieval number of their passport. An abandoned car rusted away at the side of one of the walls. A set of desk drawers for index cards had been provisionally parked beneath one of the trees. Nearly a hundred A4 sheets of paper were attached to the walls with scotch tape. Names were not in alphabetical order. Respective applicants exchanged tips on how to understand the order within the seemingly endless list of printed names. This mutual support somehow alleviated the sense of frustration inherent in everybody making his or her way through the chaos. While searching meticulously through every sheet of paper for Delphine's name, my high heel shoes sank into the mud of the unpaved backyard.

When Delphine concluded that her name was not on the wall, tears came out of her eyes. Getting a passport is much more than an administrative procedure. It was a big step towards her dreams and ambitions of bush. Delphine needed her passport 'at any cost' to be able to apply for her scholarship. Yet, the procedures were unclear. An applicant next to Delphine asked whether she had applied for her passport on her own. Facilitation and going through contacts is common practice. An elder man said to Delphine that he knew somebody inside the police department and we exchanged telephone numbers. There were two policemen among those searching through the many sheets of paper. They had been sent by family members to facilitate matters, considering they would have better means to understand how things work or access to people who do. We exchanged telephone numbers with one of these policemen and later even got a lift from him. As two young women (one white and one Cameroon), Delphine and I easily managed to establish the kind of contacts and connections that could help in our quest for her passport.

After all this confusion, frustration and fear, Delphine was full of joy when eventually I managed to locate her name after all. We returned to the original queue and she was promptly given her passport. Proudly holding her brand-new passport, she asked me to fix the moment in a photo. One step closer to becoming a bushfaller, she had dressed up explicitly for this photo before going to the police. After having safely travelled back to Buea, friends of hers called with questions

about passports. She was now in a position to pass on information and advice on how to go about the process. She had now become an intermediary and facilitator.

By approaching the intermediaries outside the police station as credible sources of official documentation, Delphine did not make a distinction between state and non-state intermediaries. By implication, distinctions between intermediaries cannot be taken for granted, but need to be studied.

### *Delphine's visa and the remoteness of regulatory requirements*

Delphine received the news that she had indeed been granted a scholarship to travel and study in Sweden with great joy. After celebrating, she needed to apply for the visa. Even with the scholarship, matters for the visa were more complicated than I had expected. It was very difficult to locate the correct Internet page for the Swedish embassy in Cameroon. The contact addresses of visa officials were located with yahoo providers. In the end, we only found the right kind of information on the exact contact details of the Swedish consulate service through contact people and friends of Delphine, which was the safest and most direct way for her to gain access to the consulate.

Despite the scholarship that she had been granted, Delphine was afraid to receive a visa refusal – like most other people she knew. She believed that her entire life now depended on this visa. Both her families would be better off if only she could make it out. My host mother and I assisted Delphine as well as we could. As a university lecturer, my host mother advised Delphine to instruct the school in Sweden to post the letter of invitation ‘express’ and to both Delphine and the Consulate directly. My task was to download the application form from the Internet. Delphine jokingly started calling us her doki men. Yet, even though she had two doki women supporting her with unknown and alien procedures, Delphine remained fundamentally afraid over whether or not she would be granted her visa.

When the letter of invitation arrived, Delphine spent a sleepless night worrying over whether or not she would ever make it to bush. A mistake had been made; the letter of invitation was addressed to Delphine Matek Che and Delphine wanted her letter to be issued to Matek Delphine. The confusion had started when Delphine filled in her application form. She had put Delphine as her first name and Matek as her second name. As she read ‘family name’, she filled in her father’s name, which is Che. However, Che is not on any of her documents.<sup>9</sup>

Within the Cameroonian system, Delphine does not have a family name. The only category available on her birth certificate is name and that reads ‘Matek Delphine’. The birth certificate does not suggest that Delphine and Matek are different categories of names. Matek is a name that stems from the village of origin of her (biological) parents, with whom she only lived the first five years of her life.<sup>10</sup> She was the only one in her family with the name Matek.

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9 For a discussion of the fairly recent historical emergence of last names, see (Scott 1998: 64- 71).

10 Delphine’s parents were predominantly based in Tiko. Delphine’s mother, however, did regularly stay in an outskirt area of Buea to do farm work. When Delphine’s father fell ill, Delphine’s mother returned to Tiko. This is when, as Del-

Delphine was thus very afraid they would not issue her a visa based on the name Delphine Matek Che. So when filling in the visa application form, Delphine resolutely decided not to repeat her prior mistake. She told me that this time she would leave the space for family name free.

To leave the space for the family name open was to her was the truest way of fitting her names into the available boxes on the application form. While certainly true from her perspective, not having a family name would most probably not have worked for Embassy officials. As her dokiman, I thus advised her to pretend that Matek was her family name. With this pretend family name, Delphine eventually got her visa.

States have embraced societies through bureaucratic mediating devices such as birth certificates and identity cards that are supposed to render legible the bureaucratic subject. Yet, any identification is also the creation of a subject. As a visa applicant, Delphine thought of her name in a different manner from what was required for applications forms. She needed advice to fill in the form in a way that rendered her legible and viable as a visa applicant. She needed the support of other people so that the regulatory requirements of the consulate service could become legible to her. Yet, this process of mediation also transformed realities. These days, all administrative instances in Sweden treat Matek as Delphine's family name.

Delphine (newly baptized as Delphine Matek) did not trust the bureaucratic process that her application would undergo. Her fear was grounded in several aspects. Firstly, Delphine knew little about processes of visa applications. Through her social environment, Delphine just knew how hard and difficult it was to get a visa. Thus, it was difficult to believe that through her scholarship she now almost had an 'entitlement' to be granted a visa.

Secondly, as the example of Delphine's missing family name illustrates, the regulatory requirements of paper are at times far removed from local Cameroonian realities. Bureaucratic norms do not easily coincide with naming techniques or practices in any given situation and thus require mediation and translation. We also saw that the Internet is not always as immediate and safe a source of information as sometimes implied in the public relation work of Embassies. Imitations of government sites exist because of their potential revenue making capacity.

In Cameroon, the strangeness of regulatory requirements was a recurring theme in narratives of visa refusals. For example, embassies asked for bank statements, yet only a small proportion of the population has a bank account. Bank statements are not only to prove the availability of sufficient financial funds. The function of bank statements - as explained by an American consulate officer - is the documentation of the economic activities of a person over the course of a certain amount of time. A profile of the economic, social and geographic ties of a person is created by way of their financial transfers. This technology of mediation draws up portraits of people through the markers left on a piece of paper through money transfers, card payments and cash withdrawals.

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phine told me, it was decided that she was to stay in the house of the family that was then to become her new home.

In Cameroon, only a small portion of financial activities and money exchanges pass through the banking system. Important savings occur through family meetings and njangi groups.<sup>11</sup> Cash payments mean that most forms of economic activities remain invisible to the banking system. In such a context, profiles of people drawn up by a banking statement will be distorted. Even those who indeed have bank accounts use them less than cash, hence their economic and social activities would not properly be reflected by bank documentation. Most people's economic and financial activities thus remain unintelligible to a consulate officer who starts to read the applicant through the piece of paper that is a bank statement.

The strangeness of regulatory requirements and their lack of intelligibility further contribute to the need for intermediaries that facilitate the act of translation. Just duped by a facilitator, a neighbour stressed in conversation with me that one has to be very careful when trying to fall bush. 'You can't confuse things.' 'Your names have to be intact.' In addition, even if one is working simultaneously in two professions, she told me, it was better to just indicate one. Otherwise misunderstandings might occur as to the nature of your 'real' work. My neighbour experienced the regulatory demands of papers as in contradiction to her own realities. Yet, as she was beginning to understand these regulatory requirements, she was eager to do her best 'not to confuse things'. Hence, she decided to indicate only one of her two professions and made sure to stick to one particular order of her names.

Regulatory requirements only allow that one version to be the 'true' version. In the course of failed emigration attempts, the above-mentioned neighbour had learned that she needed to translate her life so that she fitted the requirements and categories on the forms of the consulate service. Any doubt, or as she puts it 'confusion', risks being interpreted as fraud. This act of translation between her life and the categories of the consulate office is mediated by the norms that underlie its categories. The conventions of the consulate are not self-evident and it thus takes skills, knowledge and experience to be able to operate according to its exigencies.

Some regulatory requirements of consulate offices are remote from the realities of many visa applicants in Cameroon. The study of Delphine's experience of regulatory requirements has shown us how the intelligibility of regulatory requirements becomes part of a narrative of luck, and the need for mediation. In the next section, I explore various types of mediation that the remoteness of regulatory requirements produces.

### ***Delphine's departure: visas, mangos and foolishness***

Anxiety and fear about her upcoming departure continued even after Delphine had a visa in her passport. Her new home university in Sweden assisted her with the purchase of the travel tickets. Yet, stories of ultimate failure to leave the country were too common and Delphine remained uncertain about her eventual departure.

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<sup>11</sup> Njangi meetings are saving groups. They are often, but not always ethnically organised and divided by gender (Ardener & Burman 1996).

I frequently heard stories about families that faced disappointments after acquiring a visa and purchasing a flight. For instance, a person would be refused entry at the airport in the respective country because the visa was only valid for another few days. This feeds into narratives of refusals in terms of bad luck, witchcraft and jealousy. It also requires an increased need for mediation.

On the day of her flight, Delphine hired a big van so that family members could go with her to the airport. The van meant to hold 20 people and was filled in the end with roughly 40 people. Friends and family dressed up for the occasion in their best church clothing. The back of the van was filled with cooked food. Her family and friends intended to stay until 02:00 at the airport to watch the airplane take off with Delphine inside.

I had already accompanied another informant called Martina with her extended family to the airport and knew this to be a very common procedure. Delphine's fears on the evening of her departure were the same as Martina's fears. Martina was leaving for Dubai with a visa that she had been given from the migration brokers Mr. James (see the preceding chapters). The origins of their visas mattered little for how Delphine and Pamella were apprehending their departure. In front of state officials who carefully examine anxiety in aspiring travellers (Gilboy 1991; Heyman 1995, 2001), however, signs of anxiety are enough to warrant questioning, detention and even expulsion (Salter 2007: 59). The manner in which my informants received their visas, directly through the consulate or from migration broker such as Mr. James, made no difference. Aspiring travelers simply feel anxious in front of state officials (Gilboy 1991; Heyman 1995, 2001).

Delphine explained her fears to me six months after her arrival in bush:

*People like me will panic about visa even when we know that we are on scholarship. Luckily enough my kojo at one point suddenly became my doki man, calling the consular office, trying to make me feel relaxed, following me to the airport....*

Even in the case of a migration trajectory that would have been qualified by state officials in all ways as 'legal', mediation was important for Delphine's sense of control over the outcome of her travel project.

Aspiring bushfallers commonly refer to migration brokers because getting a visa is not understood as a question of 'fair' legal rules and 'good customer service' – as stipulated in the opening quotes of this chapter.<sup>12</sup> Fear and the need for an intermediary does not mean that state regulations for visas are being violated. Delphine's case demonstrates how additional help was needed in order to be successful at the application process.

Besides actual migration brokers, other sources of mediation exist. Families call on spiritual powers to obtain their visas. They fast and pray weeks in advance before travelling to the embassy. An informant told me how she prayed before going to the embassy: 'Father, you know how much I spent for this passport. In

<sup>12</sup> Issues of luck are related, but also different from the idea that one can 'buy' a visa either directly or indirectly through acquiring (through whatever means) other pieces of documentation that would then ensure or at least increase one's chances of being granted a visa. Money is one, but not the only avenue to try and influence the probabilities of one's visa application to be successful.

Jesus name, I cover this passport with your blood.' Aspiring migrants are known to consult healers and witchdoctors. Ngambe men can give out medicine that the visa applicant will chew upon entering the embassy.<sup>13</sup> Controlled by the power of the medicine, embassy officials are said to hand out the visa.

Family members and friends often help with application processes, as well. A neighbour of mine told me about a family that had prepared a visa application for the eldest son. Because the younger brother of the eldest son had a higher level of education and was more articulate, the neighbour told me that it was decided that the younger brother should pose as the older brother during the interview. In this way, chances for a visa approval were considered higher.

Both my neighbour and Delphine considered the one brother stepping for the other in a visa interview as legitimate and normal.<sup>14</sup> When I asked Delphine whether she considered that any rules were broken by such a procedure, she told me the following:

*NO!! Why will they see it as breaking the rules? It's just a way to help the family! There is just nothing wrong with that. He is just helping his brother to get the visa and at the same time he is helping the whole family, too. Because if the brother whom he is going in for gets the visa, then it for the benefit of the whole family.*

This reaction to the story of the neighbour reflects Delphine's understanding of visa application processes not being for the individual, but as a project for the entire family. As such, the mediation of family members is entirely legitimate and, to some degree, not even considered to be mediation. At another level, the decision of the family to send the younger brother also reveals an understanding of visa interviews as a technology needing to be mastered, rather than the transparent<sup>15</sup> process the U.S. consulate officer told journalists on the open day.

I witnessed how visas were understood both as family projects and as technologies when listening to a radio show in Buea. A popular journalist discussed in Pidgin with his listeners whether or not a family in Buea had been right to curse their son when he returned from Europe at the end of the expiry date of his visa.<sup>15</sup> Five listeners who called in said that the boy had been right to respect the limits of his visa. Six listeners who called in argued that the boy had wasted a lifetime's opportunity that was unlikely to repeat itself again. Given that his parents had spent a huge amount of money on his flight ticket, his return was considered to be irresponsible and 'foolish':

*Things are difficult in Cameroon. As he's already been able to get over there, he should try to work a little bit – send money from there. In my point of view, once you've*

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<sup>13</sup> Ngambe men are diviners bestowed with magical powers.

<sup>14</sup> As I was only told this story second hand, I do not know whether or not the two brothers were successful with their visa application.

<sup>15</sup> In the course of my research period, the journalist and I became friends and he accepted to follow my suggestion for the particular theme of this talk show. He had run programmes and discussion on bushfelling before and was even closely involved with one of the two migration brokers with whom I worked in Buea (see the two previous chapters).



*already struggled so hard to even just get the visa, you go and then you come back. Most probably, it will be very difficult for him to get a visa again to go back.*<sup>16</sup>

In the ensuing discussion, another listener established a metaphor between visas and mangos:

*It's as if a man climbs on top of a tree because he wants to harvest a mango. He touches the mango, but then climbs down again - only to pick up a stone and try to harvest the mango in that way. It's foolish!*<sup>17</sup>

Delphine also participating in the radio show said that, even for a person who had already managed to travel once, the chances of mastering the bureaucratic machine again and be granted another visa were too slim to risk a return. To her, mastering the technology once was not a guarantee for another visa in the future.

Uncertainty within the visa application processes is not equal for everyone. When Delphine described her fears at the airport, she referred to 'people like me'. The narrative of luck is a well-founded narrative of those who have fewer tools to master the technologies that it takes to be granted a visa. In the next section, I look in more detail at the various technologies of mediation at play within the U.S. consulate section. I explore how some processes of mediation get legitimated and others delegitimated. I do so by ethnographically analysing the work and decision-making processes of those actors in the position of power to hand out visas.

### **Legal mediation and mediated law: behind the window of the US consulate service**

To avoid statist portrayals (i.e. a perspective that sees like the state), it is important to ethnographically consider how agents that act in the name of the state operate (Mitchell 1991). This section of the chapter studies ethnographically how legal frameworks are interpreted, applied, performed and mediated within the consulate service of the U.S. Embassy. I ask how decision-making processes are governed at embassies.

Salter pointed out that the right to be presumed innocent or to have a fair trial is held in abeyance at the border (2006: 169). As Spire has demonstrated, discretionary powers can be crucial in the adjudication of the applications of (intending) immigrants (2008: 46). It is hence not just the illegal traveler that is 'in a space

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<sup>16</sup> 'Kontri don strong and as e don reach for dey, e for dey try work small thing, dey send them money. For me, as you don struggle sote you don get that visa, you go dey and now e don cam back, some time e go strong for I for get that visa for go back for dey.'

<sup>17</sup> 'E dey like man wey e climb on top tree say e want go cut mango. Then e go, e touch the mango, e leave am - then come down, come pick stone begin to shoot am. That one na foolish.'

of lawlessness' (Khosravi 2007: 324). Within consulate offices, too, laws offer little protection to visa applicants.

Salter puts forward that travelers (or in my case visa applicants) are 'subject to the law, but not subject in the law (2006: 169).' Rather than to talk of the rule of law, he suggests that 'rule by decision' would characterize governance dynamics better (2006: 182). Such a conceptualisation of the border foregrounds the use of sovereign force over the role and importance of the law. One of the promises of such a line of analysis rests with the demystification of 'the law' as a guiding and organising principle of processes at embassies.

I argue that the narrative of legality is a legitimizing, rather than explanatory device. I first of all pay attention to elements of chance within processes of legal mediation. I then discuss assumptions that drive decision-making processes. Finally, I discuss processes of boundary-making between legitimate and illegitimate forms of mediation within the space of the embassy.

### ***At McDonald's: chance in the production chain***

From the heat of the taxi to the cold of the entrance hall, I experienced heavy security checks while I had a last little chat in Pidgin with Cameroonian staff. As I then entered the main embassy building, a friendly American voice greeted me with, 'Are you a citizen?' I am, yet not of the United States of America. The floor was so shiny and clean, that I was almost gliding through the hall. I explained the purpose of my visit and was instructed to wait for the consul in chief in the waiting room. For a short while, I sat on the side of the Cameroonian visa applicants and I watched the video I described in the opening of this chapter.

Later in conversation with consular officers, I learned that the video serves more as a warning. At times U.S. consulate staff contacted the Cameroonian police about applicants that have committed fraud. Yet, this was not a usual practice. American Embassy officials did not want to give policemen further opportunities to receive 'financial motivations' in exchange for the release of people charged of fraud. Nevertheless, this video played in a continuous loop in the waiting room. The consulate office was being portrayed as a place in which violations of the law were persecuted harshly as acts of criminality.

Eventually, the consulate officer picked me up in the waiting room. He took me to the big open office where the consulate officers work. At the end of the big room, behind a multitude of desks and different workspaces, I see a series of cubicles. The actual office of the consulate section is a wide and open space. Yet, the desk behind the window where the consulate officers sit and take their decisions is a mere set of tiny office cubicles. Computer screens, other technical equipment, files, forms and a pile of passports were crammed onto the small desks. Each small cubicle has a window through which the consulate staff can see the visa applicants. Communication was only possible through the usage of loudspeakers. The consulate staff referred to these cubicles as 'behind the window.'

At the side of the office next to the interview cubicles was a door that led to a small office where locally employed Cameroonian staff registered the visa fees of

the applicants and helped with other more technical tasks related to the processing of granted visas. Next to this small closed-off room, was another open space of office where two more senior level Cameroonian staff worked. Both men are highly educated, very dynamic and in their late 30s.<sup>18</sup> They were part of the anti-fraud unit and responsible for the investigation of various claims in application files for diversity lottery visas, as well as immigrant visas.

The desks in their office were covered with photographs that consulate staff had identified as fraudulent. On one of the shelves, they proudly showed me a folder with letters of apology from Cameroonian applicants for having committed fraud. They traveled all throughout the country to investigate family ties of applicants and conducted cross-interviews with the spouses of applicants for immigrant visas.<sup>19</sup> One of the American consulate officers shared with me how sometimes he would walk into the interview room – reserved for immigrant visas and other matters – and asked the two Cameroonian staff to tone down the aggressiveness of their enquiries.

The exercise of authority within embassies was organised according to layers of citizenship. Visa application fees were taken by Cameroonian staff. Fingerprints were taken by lower ranking American staff. Files were prepared by local American staff. The ultimate power to decide over a visa rested strictly with the consular officers. The interviews for non-immigrant visas that I observed ‘behind the window’ were all visa interviews for non-immigrant visas, thus for study, business or visiting purposes.<sup>20</sup> During my period of observation, there were two consulate officers conducting the visa interviews ‘behind the window.’

One of the American consulate staff members was in his late 30s, white American, married and a former peace-corps volunteer. The other was older, not married and about to move to a new post on another continent. The young consulate officer was more advanced in his career and more professional and diplomatic in his conversations with me. In his explanations of his work, his intention was to inform and educate me, but he was simultaneously aware of how our interactions also constituted an act of public relations. The older consulate staff officer was also white American, and more confidential and open in his remarks regarding his work and views of migration. He took my presence as a somewhat pleasant diversion from his daily routines and an opportunity to share his grievances about his work and the problems of migration.

Both officers would joke that they felt as if they were working at McDonalds. Instead of handing out burgers, they were deciding whether or not to hand out

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<sup>18</sup> I did not have an occasion to conduct more extended research with these two young men.

<sup>19</sup> At the French consulate service, Cameroonian staff has less autonomy and responsibility. French consulate officers send out Cameroonian staff to verify information in the town halls all throughout the country. However, the Cameroonian staff in this case was sent out with empty forms to fill in the respective information from the birth and marriage registers. The actual comparison of this information with the information in the certificates submitted by visa applicants was conducted by French staff.

<sup>20</sup> My discussion of visa application processes at the French Embassy in the following chapter is based on immigrant visas and thus already on this ground the analyzed visa application procedures of both chapters cannot be compared with one another.

visas. In all their explanations to me, both officers stressed their ambition to be ‘user friendly’ and ‘time efficient’. The measurement of the quality of how they were treating application files and taking decision was in their minds similar to the one at McDonalds. The objective they were trying to achieve was one of good service in little time.

On average, not more than three minutes was spent on a single case. Both American officers referred to their work as being similar to the work at an assembly line. The height of the piles of passports in front of the cubicles did not allow for much breathing space.<sup>21</sup> Two consulate officers worked with anything between 100 and 150 visa applications per day.<sup>22</sup> The consulate officers proceed through a series of mechanical steps. Prefabricated refusal forms were available in both French and English. In the case of a refusal, the passport was handed back immediately. If a visa was granted, local American staff picked up the passports and processed the visa. Payments for the visas were taken before the interview. Everybody paid, regardless of whether the visa was granted or not.

When the tension became too high, the officers escaped back into the wide and open office space. Considerable stress was connected to making important decisions within not much more than one to two minutes per case. The pressure was released through jokes: ‘We have to send somebody every once in a while.’ Alternatively, ‘You feel warm and fuzzy today?’

### ***Rule by decision***

The decisions are based on interpretations of section 214(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA): ‘Every alien shall be presumed to be an immigrant until he establishes to the satisfaction of the consular officer, at the time of application for admission, that he is entitled to a non-immigrant status.’ To qualify for a visitor or student visa, an applicant must overcome the suspicion of being an intending immigrant. The law places this burden of proof on the applicant. A visa will be granted if an applicant can convincingly prove strong ties to his country of origin.<sup>23</sup> The greatest majority of visa interviews ended with the consulate officer ticking and signing a form where this law is printed.

The U.S. state department website names examples of such ties: a job, a house, land ownership, a family and a bank account.<sup>24</sup> I followed many a case study of visa applicants at the consulate service. The process for reviewing visas does not allow for much concentration on individual details and specificities. The specificity is in the law and not in the individual person on the other side of the window. This means that the focus of attention is on legal frameworks and categories, which are the point of departure for decision-making processes.

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<sup>21</sup> While the laws and procedures for non-immigrant visas are very different at the French and the American consulate service, both share very tight workspaces and heavy time constraints in their work.

<sup>22</sup> Contrary to the expectations of my informants, there were no fixed rates for acceptance and refusals per day.

<sup>23</sup> See also [http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials\\_1361.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials_1361.html)

<sup>24</sup> [http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials\\_1361.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials_1361.html)

Aspiring migrants first become visible to the regulatory authority of the embassy through their application forms for visas. The consular officers pointed out to me that their decisions on non-immigrant visas were not paper-based. The consulate officer often already chose the respective form after a quick glance through the application form as the applicant was still approaching the window. The impressions (before and) during the interview were paramount to the decision of consulate officers to accept or deny a visa application.<sup>25</sup>

The physical appearance and self-presentation of the applicant were crucial in the decision on whether or not the visa applicant will be seen as an intending immigrant. In the encounter, officers searched for exceptions to what they considered to be normal behaviour. These norms stemmed from the life worlds of the visa officers. Deviance from the norm was registered as suspicion and thus in many cases as a cause for refusal. Nervousness, discomfort and anxiety were mostly read as signs of bad intent (Salter 2006). As one applicant approached the window, the officer next to me remarked how he did not think the applicant had ever worn a suit before. As another applicant left the window with a visa refusal, the officer shared with me his despair at the slowness and hesitations of some applicants in giving him answers. Applicants that want to leave for study projects, but speak poor English were not credible and risked not being granted a visa.

While standing behind the consulate officers, I was struck by how the spoken word of applicants was instantly converted into legal codes which the consulate officer then filled into the respective boxes on the computer screen. The answers and narratives were immediately translated into categories, such as purpose of travel, type of visa, type of family situation. Depending on these legal codes, the consulate officer took a positive or negative decision on the spot.

Applicants could not see what the consulate officer typed on their computers and hence could not follow how what they had said was being translated by the officers. Through their own satellite Internet, officers accessed various databases. While the question and answer session occurred, the consulate officer could view a checklist of legitimate courses of study, as well as the track record of a person's prior travel. Many times the respective refusal form had already been chosen before the interview began. Sometimes the form was already signed as the last questions were still being asked. Such observations helped to explain how and why informants experienced the judgment of their visa applications to be a question of luck. If the decision is yes, the applicant was saluted with a friendly, 'Welcome to America'.

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<sup>25</sup> While paper is not very important at the U.S. embassy for non-immigrant visas, this is different from immigrant visas. In this chapter, I only discuss non-immigrant visas. I will discuss immigrant visas for the case of the French consulate service in the following chapter. With regards to non-immigrant visas at the French consulate, its regulations and procedures are very different from the U.S. consulate service. First of all, applicants at the French consulate are not a priori assumed to be intending immigrants. Secondly, the decision is not taken on the spot by the officer. In the French system, consular officers receive visa applicants and provide support and advice on the correct composition of the application files. Certain questions are asked to verify that the application is coherent. The officers make small remarks on the file. Yet, the final decision is only taken in a second step by a so-called commission. This commission is de facto the diplomatic employee of the consulate service. The preparatory comments of the other consulate officers have divided the files into clear rejections, clear approvals and borderline cases. As a consequence, the role of the physical encounter is much more important at the U.S. consulate service than at the French consulate service.

At times, the officers tried to bring me into the decision making process. 'Here! What do you think?' I felt very uncomfortable with the suggestion to actually participate or even just give my opinion. Yet, both officers repeatedly spoke out invitations to complicity. As men who were older in age, and also more advanced in their careers, they offered a share of their insights from their many years of experience. As a white woman of German nationality at a Dutch university, they assumed I was on their side. And part of their motivation to actually allow me to observe their work was for them to demonstrate how complex and difficult their work was. In the face of their invitations, I tried to avoid making statements the best I could. Yet, the vagueness of my responses to the files and cases obliged me to experience the set of expectations with which the officers were working. To quickly reduce applicants 'with complex identities and claims to home into objects of danger or benefit' (Salter 2007: 59) is precisely what makes you into a good professional at a consulate office. My reluctance to pronounce judgments was viewed as a lack of a capacity for intellectual sharpness.

The nature of the work and its dynamics were such that the only survival strategy for the officers to cope with their work was to be constantly suspicious. To make time for careful analysis and ambiguity was to be inefficient and to fail in the job. To make space for doubt was to be naïve and to do the work badly. By contrast, to be suspicious was a sign of professionalism, as well as a means to cope with the workload. Officers dealt with the workload by looking for overall structures, patterns and then the small oddity at stake that would make a case tilt towards the pile of folders of either visa denials or visa approvals. This disposition of the consulate worker meant that there was chance involved in whether or not applicants would be able to overcome the suspicion of the consulate workers. While consulate officers might point out that these elements of chance are mere moments of indispensable imperfection, Spire has worked out that acts of administrative discretion are at the core of the politics of migration management (2007; 2008: 8).

The information that is extracted through the oral statements of the applicants, as well as implicitly through his or her clothing, body language, linguistic skills and bureaucratic norms is crucial for the decision making process of the visa officer. In the encounter, officers search for exceptions to what they consider to be 'normal' behaviour. These norms stem from the life worlds of the visa officers. Deviance from the norm is registered as suspicion and thus in many cases as a cause for refusal. Nervousness, discomfort and anxiety are mostly read as signs of bad intent (Salter 2006).

In his ethnographic analysis of the work of immigration inspectors in the U.S., Gilboy found that official risk profiles are intermingled with national stereotypes. In a similar vein, Heyman has suggested that officers of the U.S. Integration and Naturalisation Service make decisions according to a covert classificatory system at the Mexican border that is developed in addition to the legal framework in which they operate and that relies on perceived moral worth, national origins stereotypes and apparent social class. In contrast to the state officials analysed by Gilboy (1991) and Heymen (1995), the visa officers with whom I worked did actually live in the country of the people whose cases they were treating and deciding.

Having wanted to focus mostly on the perspective of aspiring migrants, I did not conduct extensive fieldwork with consulate officers outside of their workspace. However, from the interactions that I had with both American – but also French – consulate officers, their life worlds appeared to be most predominantly shaped by norms and values of their societies of origin and the wider expatriate community in Yaoundé. The degree of familiarity of consulate officers with Cameroonian specificities in food, family arrangements and social life were mostly not particularly strong. Despite the Cameroonian staff employed at the embassy, the more senior U.S. consulate officer knew about salary levels in Cameroon only through his chauffeur and cook.<sup>26</sup> His (domestic) employees were his intermediaries. If the norms against which visa applicants are measured and judged are fundamentally routed in societies of arrival, it becomes clear how and why there is an element of chance involved in the translation processes between visa applicant and consulate officer.<sup>27</sup>

After the interview, visa officers took the fingerprints of the applicants and stored the digital photos of all applicants on their computers.<sup>28</sup> Biometric data was assigned to all bodies that ask for a visa and subsequently stored within databases. Visa applicants did not have a choice in the matter. The biometric data of visa applicants was matched to a database with classificatory remarks. These classificatory included visa refusals, as well as remarks about potentially dubious papers within the application files.

Visa refusals were stored in the computer and paired with the respective photo. Through the fingerprints, consulate officers could verify whether this particular person had already applied within the same embassy under a different name for a visa. An informant of mine in Buea told me that she had been ‘lucky’ that her visa denial had not been stamped into her passport. Yet, the denial and her photo had been stored within the computer system of the Embassy. In this sense, narratives of luck are a reflection of elements of contingency within the process, as well as of misapprehension and unintelligibility, but finally also reflecting the degree of powerlessness on the part of visa applicants.

### ***Mediated law, suspicion and the production of boundaries***

I spoke about chance and the role of technologies of mediation within the struggle over probabilities in visa application processes. I now will discuss the framing of certain types of mediation as non-mediation and others as illegitimate. Consulate

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<sup>26</sup> There was one notable exception to this more general lack of knowledge. Staff at the consulate office was acutely aware of the terminology of *dokimen* in their speeches and warnings against migration brokers, they adopted this term.

<sup>27</sup> For non-immigrant visas at the U.S. consulate, there is no system of reviews and checks. Whether or not visa applicants at the French consulate have a possibility to have their denial reviewed depends heavily on the type of visa for which they have applied, as well as on how they have been categorized as applicants in relation to French citizens or holder of French residence permits.

<sup>28</sup> At the French embassy, too, fingerprints are taken of all visa applicants and then shared with other European embassies.

officers perform the law and construct boundaries between deserving visitors of the U.S. and potentially fraudulent and criminal visa applicants. Yet, they simultaneously also produce boundaries between different types of mediation.

U.S. consulate staff relied on predominantly three types of technologies that support consulate offers in identifying visa applicants and making decisions. These three technologies were forms of documentation, story telling and biometrics, that is, taking and storing digital photos and fingerprints. At Embassies, the identity of a visa applicant was operationalised through the information stated on the passport, the matching application form and other supporting pieces of documentary evidence, such as bank statements, pay slips, letters of invitation or tax receipts. As Van der Ploeg points out, these practices do not simply determine pre-existing identities, but 'establish identity in the sense that 'identity' becomes that which results from these efforts' (Van der Ploeg, 1999: 300).

It is because forms of documentation, interviews and fingerprinting establish identities that I take these technologies to be instances of mediation. While U.S. consulate staff would consider their own work to be transparent and immediate, I consider papers, interviews and fingerprinting as instances of mediation because I study different regulatory authorities at the same level playing field (Ferguson 2006: 112). From this perspective, distinctions between acts of mediation within the supposed sphere of the state as transparent and immediate and, within the sphere of the market as money-driven and potentially criminal lose their apparent self-evidence. This approach only becomes possible if one studies state actors without beginning to see like state actors (Scott 1998).

Mitchell has pointed out the need to 'examine the political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinctions' between state and society, or, in this case, state and market are produced (2007:170). As I have pointed out in the introduction of this dissertation, I wish to take up this call by analyzing state and non-state governance within a common frame and thus taking acts of boundary-making as productive moments. Ferguson points out how state authorities spatialise their power in ways that construct state authority to be 'on top', in terms of vertical height and all 'encompassing', in terms of spatial reach (Ferguson 2006: 90). Routine bureaucratic practices produce conceptions such as the one of 'legality' (Ferguson & Gupta 2002). In analyzing the governance dynamics that surround visas, this chapter studies an example of such bureaucratic practices.

The ethnographic vignettes above have already demonstrated the contingency of the officers' decision making processes. Visa decisions were taken under circumstances of time pressure, incomplete documentary evidence, as well as interpretations of applicant's physical posture. These momentary decisions were then stored and rendered permanent within computer systems.

The increasing reliance on – what I have worked out to be – sophisticated technologies of mediation occurred within a context in which embassies fashioned themselves as the protector of visa applicants who fall prey to the criminal work of dokimen. The video with which I opened this chapter simultaneously framed



the visa applicant as both threat and victim.<sup>29</sup> As always potentially implicated in fraud, all visa applicants were a priori criminalised and suspicious as potential threats to national security. Yet, while all aspiring visa applicants were considered to be potentially illegal immigrants, the discourse that followed the screening of the video also allowed aspiring migrants appear as potential victims of dokimen. The naïveté of visa applicants let them fall prey to the deeds of both criminal and commercial migration brokers. Contingent decisions were rendered into permanent truth claims in the name of the protection of visa applicants from illegitimate forms of mediation – namely dokimen and other types and causes of fraud.

When I asked the consulate officers about their perception of their work, they said they were trying to facilitate the applicants in proving the opposite of the assumption of the law 214b. As consulate officers, they are required to adopt this posture. In such explanations both officers were performing the law by fashioning themselves as mere bureaucrats that operated only as instructed and guided by legal frameworks.

In their own language, the officers told me that they tried to prevent people from ‘jumping ship’. To jump ship implies a betrayal of an allegiance or the abandonment of a commitment. In these terms, the officers talked about people entering the country for one purpose and then overstaying the legitimate length of their stay or using their visiting or student visa for other purposes. This is how officers legitimize their work. Both officers expressed that, when in doubt, they preferred to deny a visa to somebody who was genuine in his or her intentions to return to Cameroon after their visa expired than to risk granting a visa to somebody who might overstay their visa.

Consulate officers perform the law, but are simultaneously aware of elements of chance. Cameroonian interpretations of these moments of chance are luck. Referring to the common reliance of visa applicants on intermediaries, the more senior American consulate staff revealed some of the frustrations of his daily work: ‘They are trying their luck. [...] You tell them that their documents are fraud, they smile and go away. [...] An American would be crying and apologizing.’

It is striking that the officers themselves have integrated the notion of luck into their description and analysis of visa application processes. The above quote reveals that officers are aware of the perception of applicants of getting a visa in terms of luck. They acknowledged, as we have seen before, that they can at times be ‘soft and fuzzy’. However, in conversation with me, they interpreted these moments as mere instances of imperfection that are not systemic.

The above quote also expressed the high degree of exasperation officers experienced with the calm and seemingly indifferent attitude of Cameroonian applicants when charged with fraud. Consulate officers understand their work to be implementing and interpreting the law – in and against the influences of illegitimate forms of mediation. Just as the narrative of legality delegitimizes the work of intermediaries, the narrative of luck also delegitimizes the mediation of state officials.

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29 I thank Sarah van Walsum for having pointed this out to me during one of our discussions.

Ironically, one form of officially recognized and legitimated form of luck exists within American visa procedures. Every year, the U.S. gives out 50.000 immigrant visas because of a so-called Diversity Immigrant Visa Programme. There is a fixed quote of diversity lottery visas for each country depending on whether this country has a low rate of immigration to the U.S. or not (see also Piot 2006). From October to November every year, anyone worldwide interested in an immigrant visa for the U.S. can make an entry. Per country, the winners are randomly selected. The lucky winners have to fulfill minimal eligibility requirements with respect to their educational level and their work experience. Yet, no other selection criteria are applied. With a high school degree and a minimum of two years of work experience in an occupation that requires at least two years of training, a lucky winner can go to the U.S.

While practices at the U.S. consulate are interwoven by elements of uncertainty, the source of credibility on which consulate officers base themselves is the performance of the law. Illegitimate practices of visa applicants, as well as their referral to illegitimate means of mediation give the law its appearance and importance. When applicants gave, what sounded like prepared answers, the officers turned to me and implied that the applicant was lying because he had prepared for the interview. To try to influence the result of the visa interview – as one would do for a job interview – was judged illegitimate. I also observed how a consulate officer turned down a visa applicant for a lack of motivation for the respective study project. During the interview, the applicant said that he had come to know about the university through a family friend. Connections were not judged by the consulate officer to be a valid source of information.

As explained before, the structure of the work at the consulate office demanded that applications were processed quickly for particular types of suspicion. In cases of female visa applicants, I witnessed a set of suspicions that were gender specific. A Cameroonian woman who had given birth in the U.S. was judged as a suspicious visa applicant. The officer explained to me that one never knows whether women are travelling to give birth in the U.S. so that their children will be American citizens. For the same line of reasoning, I was informed by an officer that he turned down the visa request of a young woman because her clothing had been too loose. He was not sure whether she might be pregnant.

For an applicant to have a family with children can be a strong proof that his or her ties with Cameroon are strong enough to guarantee his or her return. Yet, I also witnessed how a consulate officer refused a visa request of a woman with several younger children in Cameroon. He turned to me after having signed the refusal form saying that he did not believe that the travel project of the young woman was credible. Who was going to take care of the children in the meantime? He had come to the assessment that the children of the woman were a reason for her not to travel.

I was surprised with the honesty and openness with which the elder consulate officer revealed how economics were part of his considerations. He had hesitated on whether or not to grant a visa to a young man who wanted to travel to Las Vegas. When putting the passport of the applicant on the pile of successful passports,

he turned and joked that a man in Las Vegas would surely guarantee an inflow of money into the national economy. Needing to release the pressure under which he was working, he added: 'I hope he won't spread AIDS all over the place.' Unpaid care work, by contrast, does not benefit the U.S. economy. Visa officers do not like to give visas to elderly Cameroonian women who come to visit their daughters in the U.S. They are suspected of overstaying their visas so as to take care of their grandchildren.

There are many types of suspicious applicants. These likely candidates to 'jump ship' contribute towards the framing of state authority as being a manifestation of the 'general' interest and thus morally superior (Ferguson 2006: 89- 112). While the work of consulate officers is said to be transparent, the interactions between consulate officers and visa applicants were constantly fraught with misunderstandings. Whether linguistically or culturally, there were many instances that required translation, explanation and mediation.

Another applicant received a visa refusal amongst others because she had talked about wanting to visit her sister. In her file, it was marked that the relative whom she was going to visit in the U.S. was her cousin. In Cameroon, kinship terminology is often based on social, rather than biological ties and it is common for children to grow up in households of other than their biological parents. Consequently, distinctions between siblings and cousins or between nieces and children are not of relevance in everyday life. Behind the window at the U.S. consulate, however, only biological descriptions of kinship count. Socially adopted children are not considered sufficiently strong connections to motivate a family visit.

Not all notions can be translated into legitimate or legal categories at the level of the consulate. I witnessed one case where a middle-aged woman wanted to travel to the U.S. to visit her biological cousin (to whom she was referring as sister). The middle-aged woman had helped her relative when she had won the diversity lottery a few years ago and had for many years taken care of her relative's children. Now her sister/cousin wanted to 'appreciate' (thank) her. The Embassy has no category for appreciations. As the middle-aged woman did not have sufficient ties with Cameroon that would guarantee her return, she was not granted a visa.

During the visa interviews that I observe at the U.S. consulate, I saw how consulate officials established firm boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate forms of mediation. Anybody or anything that could have interfered with the visa application process in front of the window was considered a potential source of distortion and fraud and viewed with great suspicion by consulate officers. Yet, translation by the consulate officer behind the window was considered neutral and transparent. One applicant, for example, worked with an NGO that was growing 'eru'. The consulate officer was lost and turned to me. I could confirm that eru was indeed an important vegetable in Anglophone Cameroon. The man received his visa. When an elderly woman did not understand that her visa had been denied, the consulate officer called for help with his Cameroonian staff. The locally employed Cameroonian woman came to the window and spoke in Pidgin with the visa applicant: 'Mamie, massa don deny visa. You no go go America. Put all that paper dem back for your

bag. May I no loss. Waka fine.’<sup>30</sup> Had this woman come in the company of an intermediary, this person would have had to justify his or her presence.

Any person accompanying an applicant in front of the window where the interview is conducted is scanned and greeted with great skepticism. They have to briefly explain who they are, how they relate to the visa applicant and whether or not they have received money in exchange for accompanying the visa applicant to the interview window. Consulate officers also receive money in exchange for translating and interpreting the application files. Yet, because they do so in the name of the law, this does not put their credentials at stake.

Consulate officers establish sharp distinctions between potentially fraudulent and criminal visa applicants and clients that deserve the treatment and services of a good customer. I observed how a little black girl of fourteen years entered the consulate section together with her mother. She claimed to be a U.S. citizen. Her mother was Cameroonian. The little girl claimed to have lost her passport. She was due to go to school the day after in the U.S. and she was requesting an emergency passport to be able to travel. Her story was greeted with skepticism. The young girl and her Cameroonian mother were allowed to come into a visiting room on the other side of the interview window, but were otherwise treated with the same rough tone with which visa applicants behind the window were treated. The situation was resolved when the girl produced an old and expired American passport.

This one piece of paper radically changed the tone and mode of engagement. The fourteen-year old girl changed from being a potential source of citizenship fraud to an actual citizen. Now the only question in the minds of the officers was how to process her passport as fast and efficiently as possible to guarantee that the girl could attend school the next day. Having proven that she was indeed a citizen, the fourteen-year-old girl deserved the fastest and best kind of customer service that the consulate service could possibly provide.

The consulate officer took me into another room. It was here that empty passport books are stored in a tall safe. ‘You are looking at a fortune here,’ he told me. He was aware that his work was part of an industry and laughingly joked about the millions of people who would be dying to have one of these passports. ‘That’s why they are locked into this drawer.’

The process of boundary making between legitimate and illegitimate mediation legitimizes state mediation. Due to the commercial and money-minded migration brokers, state officials need biometric data or inter-European data sharing systems. This ever-increasing degree of sophistication in technologies of mediation within embassy spaces is needed in the name of the protection of visa applicants and in the name of the law.

The state monopolization of legitimate mobility control produces certain types of mediation as ‘legal’ and ‘legitimate’ and others as ‘illegal’ and ‘illegitimate’. The demarcation of certain types of mediation as ‘commercial’ and ‘criminal’ brings into being the very idea of ‘the law’ as an abstraction that is unmediated, imperme-

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30 ‘Mother, the man has denied your visa. You will not go to America. Put those papers back into your bag. They should not get lost. All the best.’

able to particular interests and 'external' to monetary considerations. In this sense, boundary making is productive of the narrative of legality that is assumed to characterize and govern visa application processes.

### **Travel permits, money and state regulation**

In this section, I discuss the role and meaning of monetary flows in relation to travel permits and the state's quest for a monopoly position within the regulation of legitimate mediation (Torpey 1998). While consulate officers construct the distinctions between fees, commissions and bribes as self-evident, I demonstrate here how these distinctions are the result of different ways of framing the role and meaning of monetary flows. By looking for continuities between supposedly just returns of brokerage and illegitimate remuneration (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 168), I seek to return to the puzzle of how the sphere of market and state relate to each other. I do so by analyzing the conception of visas of a neighbour of mine, my own quest of a residence permit in Cameroon, as well as the function of financial flows within the U.S. and French consulate service.

#### ***Visas as tickets***

A sales woman on the road at the entrance to my compound and I discuss my research project. 'What is a visa?' I ask. She replies to me in Pidgin: 'Visas are like identity cards that you have to show to the police before you can pass through.'<sup>31</sup> She later further elaborated and explained that 'visas are like tickets that you buy and then you can travel.' So how is a visa different from a flight ticket, I asked her. She was surprised at my question and did not have a response.

In Victorine's answers in Pidgin, identity cards, visas and travel tickets all seem to merge.<sup>32</sup> I suggest that Victorine invites us to reconsider the nature of travel permits in at least two ways. Firstly, the roadside saleswoman can help us to rethink the connection between paper and mobility. Victorine's response says she implies that visas are similar to travel tickets. As such, travel tickets constitute the permission to travel and visas are to be attained through money. Victorine does not seem

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31 'Visa I dey like identity card wey you e show am for police dem before you pass.'

32 The Pidgin word to catch all of these manifestations of paper is 'book dem' or 'doki'. 'I don get i book' can mean that the speaker received his Bachelor degree, his passport, his vaccination card or even just a simple notepad. Given that Pidgin is not a fixed or closed system, it can always include words from other languages. Depending on the level of education, words from English can be borrowed and brought into Pidgin. Depending on the level of education, distinctions between different forms of bureaucratic documentation can thus be made. Yet, the social context is such that people who only speak Pidgin and no English, will resort to the word of 'book' in reference to any form of documentation or paper.

to make distinctions between the travel papers given by state authorities or by market authorities. Both flight ticket and visa give access and allow for movement.

Secondly, in what Victorine's statement she implied that one 'buys' a visa to travel out. She refers to the money that is given when applying for a visa as merely money, but not as a 'fee.' Unwittingly, Victorine challenges – or at least does not take for granted – the neat distinction that is otherwise maintained between money that is given to Embassies as 'fees' and money that is handed over to brokers as a 'price.'

Price and fee are particular ways of framing monetary exchanges. Paying a fee confers the entitlement to have one's case processed – not necessarily approved. Paying a price implies the delivery of a service or of a good. Both labels express certain understandings and social meanings of money (Zelizer 1997). The demarcations between money as a fee and as a price imply statements about the nature of the relationship established through the handing over of the money. Price establishes a supposedly commercial relationship and fees a bureaucratic or administrative one.

Both labels are legitimising expressions that demarcate the nature of the authority of the person to whom the money given. A person who receives a fee is authorized, restrained and guided by legal and administrative rules. A person who receives a price is placed within the logics of the market. These distinctive ways of framing money create divisions between various authorities that receive money. The framing of monetary exchanges in terms of either fee or price also legitimize and delegitimize an authority and notably mark them vis-à-vis the principles that are supposed to guide its action. Taking up Victorine's cue, what happens if we think of the money that is given to brokers as fees and of the money that is handed over to consulate staff as price?

### ***Price and fee***

Interpretations of the meaning and role of money within visa application processes vary greatly. The husband of an informant of mine who successfully went to Dubai with the help of the migration broker Mr. James (see the two preceding chapters) had the following to say about the failed emigration attempts of some of his younger brothers that he had sponsored earlier, 'You pay for registration. They receive all the money and in the end they say you cannot go. They are making their money. They are thieves. Why do they take money and not give visas?' My informant's husband is talking about embassy authorities. He understands the money he gave to the embassy was a price that he had to pay. He did not conceive of the money as a fee.

One Cameroonian member of the U.S. embassy complained about acquaintances of his in the following manner: 'They just bring money and ask for how much and where they can get the visa. They are not even interested in information.' The quote of the Cameroonian consulate official at the U.S. Embassy expresses outrage at the suggestion of aspiring migrants that visas could be attained through commercial means. Yet, it also implies a belief that information is key to mastering

visa application processes. As an employee of the U.S. embassy, he was willing to be a broker of information, but not of visas.

The idea that travel documents are goods becomes more palpable when one considers the material basis of passports and the fact that, at times, a shortage of this material good can exist. When Cameroonian passports were changed over to standardized CEMAC passports, it became for a period difficult for Cameroonians to obtain passports.<sup>33</sup> They were scarce simply because state institutions did not manage to print enough of them. It is possible that some Cameroonian state officials also benefitted financially from the resulting gap in demand and offer of passports. Yet, beyond these profits, this example demonstrates how passports that are issued by state authorities can be products on a market, rather than exclusively only documents that are issued.

Another informant looked at all forms of paper as commodities. She had invested money into papers to be able to go out and to 'work money' in bush.<sup>34</sup> These papers included a marriage certificate and a business certificate. She needed these papers for the visa application. These papers had value in that they should enable her to travel out of the country to work money in bush. As the visa had then been refused, the purchased papers had lost their entire presumed value:

*Just like me struggling everyday to make papers and at the end of the day you don't succeed. All the money you don't see. You have the papers but what are you going to do with the papers?*

During fieldwork, informants talked about spending money and having connections when referring to bureaucratic processes. When I tried to get my own papers for my stay in Cameroon, I was surprised to suddenly find myself using exactly the same terminology. I 'had spent my money' and gotten my papers. When my visa expired and I needed to apply for another visa or alternatively a residence permit, information about processes, requirements and costs were not easily available. I had to travel to Yaoundé to enquire about the sort of documentation I should process in Buea to then bring these back for my application in Yaoundé. Instead of embarking on repeated 8-hour bus trips to Yaoundé, I received a residence permit in Buea for about half the money I thought I would have had to spend. The only downside was that I had no receipt to show for reimbursement with my university.

A high-ranking person at the office decided to recognize and grant me the status of a student. Instead of having to apply for another visa, I was allowed to register as a student for a one-year residence permit. Due to the flexible interpretation of one particular rule, I could get a much cheaper *carte de séjour* (rather than an extension of my old visa). It cost me 35,000 CFA – roughly 50 Euros. This sum included other minor papers required for the residence permit.

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33 CEMAC stands for 'Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale' (Monetary and Economic Community of Central Africa).

34 To 'work money' is a Cameroonian expression that de facto refers to labour migration. People want to travel to 'work money' as opposed to working the field. The expression stems historically from the labour migration from Bamenda to the coast that inserted migrants into the money economy (amongst others Konings 1993, 1995, 1996 and Ardener 1996).

I had given 35.000 CFA and in return had received the permit that I needed. The 35.000 CFA represented less money than I would have been required to spend in terms of fees for a renewal of my visa. I do not know the distribution of the 35,000 CFA to various officials for the *carte de séjour*. I could not distinguish what portion was considered fee and what might be considered a price for the supporting documents.

### ***Visas as revenue***

The money given to consulate officers is referred to as fees. Nevertheless, visas have an official revenue-generating function within consulate services. An accounting firm periodically comes and evaluates the cost of visa services of the American embassies in the world. Visa fees are then established based upon these reports. In principle, the 'visa function' is supposed to be 100 percent financed through visa fees. At the U.S. consulate, most of the salary of consulate staff comes from visa fees. Visa fees also serve to pay for computer facilities, Internet connection and some of the office furniture.<sup>35</sup>

Strictly speaking, the U.S. Embassy administration referred to visa fees as 'user fees'. The money does not pay for the issuance of a visa, but for the processing of the application and the interview. Money is not refunded if applicants do not receive a visa because the service was provided - even if not at all times to the satisfaction of the customer.

Consulate staff from the U.S. Embassy furthermore stressed in conversation with me that the above-described financial function of visa (or user) fees did not mean that U.S. consulate services were local businesses. Money obtained by consulate services for the visa (or user) fees does not remain within the consulate service, but is wired to a central account in the U.S. where it is distributed and dispatched globally to the various consulate services. Consulate services are thus not as local entities self-financed. However, the amount of money consulate services receive back from this central account does depend upon the number of visa applications that were processed.

When considering the contrasting case of the French consulate service, I was able to witness similar financial dynamics. With respect to the connection between visas and financial procedures of the consulate service, I noted that visa applicants with the French consulate have to make their appointment through a call service that was entirely outsourced to a private company. Calling fees were high. This privatised call service company was entirely financed through the telephone charges of the visa applicants.

The consulate service of the French Embassy was only very partially financed through money flows of the embassy. In contrast to the U.S. consulate in which applicants always have their interviews with diplomatic staff, the French consulate service of Yaoundé only had one diplomatic staff. The other four consulate officers were French nationals that employed on the basis of local contracts directly in

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35 See also <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/05/142155.htm>



Cameroon. The salaries of the locally employed French staff were not paid through the financial circuits of the diplomatic service in Paris, but through revenues created by the visa application fees. Every visa application contributes 40,000 CFA – roughly 60 Euros – to the maintenance of the consulate service.

All officers within the service have a very direct relationship to the money made within the service. If they forget to charge the 40,000 CFA, they themselves had to reimburse the missing money. The first step in the interview encounter was always the payment. At the end of the working day, all officers joined their cashiers and the revenue of the day was counted. Disappointment or joy depended upon whether or not the magic limit of one million CFA (1,500 Euros) had been reached in a day.

In some cases the refusal is immediately clear to the consulate officer. Yet, even if fraudulent traveller cheques have been found, all details of the applicant still need to be processed within the computer. A photo of the applicant was taken and stored in the computer system. With somewhat inefficient computers, these processes could take long and were frustrating. 'So much effort for a simple no!' complained one visa worker at the French consulate service to me. Yet, there was also a sense of relief in knowing that at least the efforts served to generate income. At the end of a long and frustrating intake procedure, the officer turned to me and jokingly said: 'Another 40,000 for us.'

Torpey (by drawing on Weber & Noiriel) considers the historical emergence of identification papers and travel permits as an important regulatory tool for states. Within his argumentation, Torpey states that 'identification papers of various kinds constitute the bureaucratic equivalent of money: they are the currency of modern state administration' (Torpey 1998: 244). He points to the fact that travel permits do not only serve to identify the traveler. As a technology of governance, identity papers and travel permits are also a resource in the literal meaning of the word.

Instead of taking the existence of travel permits for granted, I discussed in this section the emergence of different border regimes and its connections to financial dynamics. By taking the invention of travel permits as the event, I have shown how conceptions of visas by applicants and visa officers begin to overlap when one considers the financial flows that surround visa application procedures.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter took the narrative of luck as an occasion to ethnographically investigate visa interviews and connected decision-making processes for elements of chance and mediation. Luck and legality are narratives that mutually delegitimize each other. The narrative of luck undermines the narrative of legality by pointing towards elements of chance, contingency, but also arbitrariness. The narrative of legality and its counterparts, i.e. accusations of 'illegality', mark mediation and

money as external to the law. Application forms, supporting documents, interviewing and the storing of photos and fingerprints are presented as straightforward instruments in what is said to be a transparent process. The narrative of luck reclaims and challenges the state's framing of its own mediating technologies.

Luck means that the granting of a visa is contingent and dependent on things that may or may not happen. When analyzing the visa application process at the U.S. consulate, we have witnessed the important role of chance within decision-making processes. Consulate staff acknowledged chance, but framed it as a margin of error within the interpretation and application of the law. Applicants, by contrast, were aware that the convincing presentation of certain papers could enhance their chances of being granted the desired visa, but foreground the degree of uncertainty and volatility that they experienced within the interpretation of legal and regulatory frameworks.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the extent to which both legality and luck are belief systems that contribute towards the framing of some types of mediation as legitimate (and even immediate) and other as illegitimate. Processes of legal interpretation and application are always and necessarily mediated, and the work of facilitators and intermediaries needs to be seen within a continuum. All law is mediated, but not all mediation is legal. I have argued that the framing of certain types of mediation as 'illegal' should not be assumed, but taken as an instance for analysis.

In the first section, the analysis of Delphine's emigration project demonstrated how remote the embassy requirements were for many Cameroonians. It was this type of the preposterous nature of regulatory requirements that necessitates and brings into being the work of intermediaries. Increasing degrees of standardisation require and evoke the need for more mediation. The case study of Delphine furthermore illustrated how mediation is important regardless of whether the visa was issued by embassies or by migration brokers. I also illustrated that anxiety in the face of departure does not depend on whether or not a migration trajectory is likely to be qualified by state officials as 'legal' or illegal'.

The case study of the U.S. Embassy demonstrated how the law was mediated through technologies. Consulate officers relied on papers, interviews and literal technologies, such as fingerprinting and the storing of photos of all applicants, to mediate their decision to grant or deny a visa. The case study also illustrated how within the interpretation and application of legal frameworks, there always were elements of chance and contingency. Therefore, what it took to get a visa was the mastery of mediating technologies that could limit the degree of contingency.

In the third section, I have shown that the state's quest for monopoly position was intrinsically intertwined with financial regimes of governance. Visas have an income-generating function for consulate offices. Money is not external or other to the interpretation and application of legal frameworks. Instead, the framing of financial flows to consulate offices as fees creates the appearance of state mediation as being external to financial flows. The framing of money outside the consulate office as price produces boundaries between authorities. Authorities that receive money in the form of fees are constructed as 'legal' and 'transparent' and authori-

ties in which money is framed as 'price' are constructed fundamentally different and by extension as illegal' and 'commercial'.

In the video discussed in the opening of the chapter, we saw how visa applicants were simultaneously framed as potential criminals or victims of migration broker. Similar to the discourse and politics of human trafficking, the visa applicant 'guilty' of fraud can escape the status of 'criminal' by becoming the 'victim' to the criminal dokiman. This positioning of visa applicants lets the state take on the role of a double protector. Through the work of the consulate service, the state is either protecting itself from fraudulent visa applicants or it is protecting innocent visa applicants who have fallen victim to criminal dokimen.<sup>36</sup> It is this double-role of protection that legitimizes the authority of consulate staff at embassies. By extension, this double-role of protection also legitimizes the state's monopoly over the legitimate means of mobility (Torpey: 1997).

Torpey argued that studies of migration and migration policies have taken for granted the role of states and 'have thus failed to see the ways in which regulation of movement contributes to constitute the very 'state-ness' of states' (Torpey 1998: 240). Through the lens of travel documents and multiple ways of framing money, I have sought to contribute knowledge to the construction of state authority and its supposed boundaries. The boundary-making between legitimate types and illegitimate types of mediation is productive of the very notion of 'the state' and 'the law'. It creates the narrative of legality that implies that 'the law' is guaranteed to be transparent and fair and thus by extension supposedly unmediated and external to monetary logics.

This construction of the law legitimises the exercise of authority by state officials and their connected efforts to monopolise the legitimate use of violence. The framing of migration brokers in terms of crime, commerce and greed creates the state as the saviour of migrants. It is in this context that the productive functions of warnings against dokimen are best understood. The accusations against dokimen with which this chapter opened are not the condemnation of mediation per se, but rather as a struggle to establish the state's monopoly over legitimate mediation.

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<sup>36</sup> I thank Sarah van Walsum for the discussion we had on this point.

#### CHAPTER 4

### Security@marriage.fr: Marriage migration and the production of fraud and selfishness



10. Bar in Yaounde: 'Ambassade'

At the French Embassy, two printouts of e-mails hung on the walls of the little cubicle in which the consulate officers worked. In one of the e-mails, an elderly and sick French man, who is married to a Cameroonian woman in France, wrote to the consulate to denounce the fraud in which his wife is involved.

*I only needed a wife, not a forger-ess. [...] We only live off social benefits because she never wanted to work and is sending half of all benefits down to her mother. [...] The children and I can only watch the disaster. Thank you for your understanding and for protecting and helping me. Thank you.<sup>1</sup>*

He said that because he was ill with Parkinson's disease, he was not in a position to be in charge of the paperwork himself. The message is clear: Cameroonian

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<sup>1</sup> Trying to feminise the acting of committing fraud, the man is here inventing a new word. With 'faussiere', he is referring to a person who commits fraud. Original: 'On ne vit que des allocations familiales car elle n'a jamais voulu travailler et puis elle expédie plus que la moitié des allocations à sa mère. [...] Les enfants et moi ne pouvons qu'assister au désastre. Merci de me comprendre me protéger et m'aider merci.'

wives are selfish, lazy and greedy. While vulnerable French men want love and children, Cameroonian women are involved with 'fraud' or are 'fake' themselves.

Marriage migration is thus a security issue for consulate staff at embassies in Cameroon. The eager search by consulate officers for fraud within marriage migration is all about protecting vulnerable French men from Cameroonian women who are only interested in money. French men are the victims of (Internet-mediated) marriages. Very much in contrast to the narrative of mail-order brides in which Asian women are the defenceless victims of brutal American or European men, Cameroonian women are said to lure French men with their beauty into disastrous marriages. One of the French consulate officers told me that she was using all the powers at her disposal to 'protect the individual from the potential misuses of the powers of marriage.'<sup>2</sup>

When observing for a few weeks the work of the French consulate office in Yaoundé, I was struck by the tone used when talking about marriage migration.<sup>3</sup> It was articulated as a security issue and, more strikingly, the security threat was located with Cameroonian spouses and women. When questioning consulate staff at the Embassy that the cases of these e-mail posters surely must represent extreme situations, I was told that such narratives are much more common than I would think. The fact that these e-mails were pinned on the wall conveyed the inherent assumption within the regulatory dynamics of the state's governance of marriage migration. The strongest suspicions upheld against applicants referred to marriage, fraud and money. Internet marriages were strongly condemned and women who engage in these were judged for being materialistic and selfish. The presence of even just a few of those e-mails within the office space of the consulate workers constituted justification for the rationale of consulate work – a regular reminder of the security issues at stake.

In contrast to the above-described dynamics at the French consulate office, my research assistant Delphine and other informants looked with a great degree of hope towards the potential of Internet-mediated marriages with either a Cameroonian or a foreigner abroad. During the process of writing this chapter, I continued to receive repeated requests from a Cameroonian informant called Mamie Comfort:

*Hey Jill, you know I have only one thing that I will always ask you. A White Man who is serious about having a woman back here in Africa. I am not asking you for no other thing - except this. What do you think about this idea? Hey, I know it will sound funny to you but for me it's real.*

This chapter will argue that Mamie Comfort's e-mail request also stems from a set of security concerns. Mamie Comfort, in her mid 30s, was deported from the Netherlands to Cameroon about fifteen years ago. A few months after the first

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2 Within the general literature on human trafficking, the phenomenon of 'mail order brides' is often referred to as a specific subtype or form of 'human trafficking'. My own work on Internet-mediated marriage migration builds on Constable's analysis of the assumptions on which the discourse of 'mail order brides' builds (Constable 2003).

3 As pointed out in the introduction, I was able to access to the French consulate partly because of accidental chains of contacts and partly because trust was easily granted to a researcher who had graduated from the same school as most French diplomatic staff.

e-mail, I received the following e-mail from her: 'Hey, you know, I will not stop to ask you that you should look for me a serious man over there - who is interested in a real and honest relationship.' She is hoping for a man who will be 'serious' and 'honest.' Mamie Comfort's repeated stress on the realness of what she is aspiring towards seems to suggest that she, too, is afraid of fake offers of marriage that might come forward from abroad. Mamie Comfort wants to secure or obtain a suitable marriage. Only a 'serious' man can assure a marriage that safeguards her interests, needs and desires that are crucial to her personal well being.

To speak of the (human) security of aspiring migrants or their families (Doomernik 2004; Abiri 2000: 72-73) requires much more explicit explanation than to speak of the security of a nation state, its citizens and its welfare system. It is thus important to consider for whom security is an issue, from what security needs to be protected and for what ends security ought to be achieved (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007: 13- 21). Through empirical material on the life and emigration trajectories of Cameroonian women, this chapter seeks to contribute knowledge to the governance of marriage migration. By doing so through the notion of security, it puts into question different regimes of legitimacy. I hence analyse marriage visa interviews for what they can tell us about the regulatory logics that underlie the state's construction of security and security threats.

In my analysis of the construction of security threats, I focus on the state's engagement with migrant women and their families. Yet, migrant women face the regulation of both state and family authorities. In my chapter, I discuss how conflicting notions of security and multiple regulatory regimes feed into the production of fraud and selfishness in relation to marriage migration.

The aim of this chapter is to decipher how forms of regulation of marriage migration by both state and family connect and combine with one another. I take the theme of marriage migration as an occasion to study the different regulatory dynamics of as well as between the sphere of the state and the family. Although it could be very interesting, I will not focus on comparing the French and the American consulate services. Instead, I will focus on both consulates deal with the topic of marriage within their visa application procedures. While the French and the American state both come with their specific histories and cultures, they are united by important dynamics in their relation to aspiring migrant women from Cameroon. Interested in ethnography of regulation, I analyse each ethnographic case for what it reveals about state dynamics of regulation vis-a-vis Cameroonian women.

I want to demonstrate that instruments of control by both family and state follow different logics but in practice are both engaged in the regulatory ambitions over women. Both family and state regulation at times come together in their efforts to keep control over the mobility (and sexuality) of migrant women. More insights on issues of fraud and security follow from this study of the regulation of marriage migration by both state and family. After a discussion of how marriage migration gets framed and represented differently by both state and family, this chapter will dive into the constructions of security respectively at the French and American consulate, then within family structures and finally from the perspective of an individual Cameroonian woman.

## **Border spectacles of marriage migration**

I hope my study opens up a new view onto statist accusations of fraud and selfishness at the consulate. It seeks to do so both by uncovering multiple security issues inherent to the topic of marriage migration and by unravelling assumptions on which these accusations are based within the regime of state regulation. Security is not an emic concept, but an analytical lens through which I analyse my empirical material. As an analytical lens, security enables me to shed new light onto the 'border spectacle' of marriage migration of which the opening e-mails of this chapter are an example (De Genova 2005: 242- 249).

### ***Securitisation, security and marriage migration***

In 2007, there were about 1.000 visa applications at the French consulate for family reunion – this figure also includes visas for children rejoining their parents in France. Of these 1.000 visa demands, 730 demands were granted. While more than two thirds of all family reunion visas are granted, officers placed emphasis on the applications that according to them had be turned down. The focus of embassy staff is not on the number of legitimate and accepted visas, but instead there is recurrent talk of 'fraud' and the accusations of marriages of convenience. What the images, posters and public statements portrayed is not in alignment with the every day dynamics of actual functioning of the consulate service De Genova's notion of 'border spectacle' can usefully help to resolve this puzzle (2002: 436- 439).

De Genova suggests that state officials perform spectacles of border enforcement. Such 'border spectacles' render visible the illegality of migrants, but not the law that in fact produces the illegality of migrants. The legal production of illegality thus becomes naturalised and no longer seems to require further exploration. Yet, it is also why I ethnographically analyse consulate dynamics within a chapter on marriage migration. This study allows as to see how the very instruments that are used to authorise migration, such as for example visas and bridewealth payments, can simultaneously also produce risks.

In the last decade, politicians and policy makers have increasingly framed migration as an issue of security (Nyers 2003: p. 1069; Spire 2008: 16). Firstly, the very process of securitization – and thus not migration itself – merits critical investigation (Neal 2009). Bigo characterises the contemporary mode of regulation of migration in terms of a 'governmentality of unease'. In his critique, the securitisation of migration has led to the development of profiling techniques and related technologies that help to determine who is to be surveyed, questioned, detained or removed from the territory of receiving nation states (Bigo 2002: 82). The opening e-mails shown in this chapter show that the dynamics and political processes behind the framing of migration are concerns for security (Bigo 2002). A study of the very process of securitization can denaturalize contemporary common places on migration and security (De Haas 2008) and open up new possibilities for framing migration.

Secondly, the possibility of taking security as the starting point of analysis, albeit not in its supposed meaning and relationship to migration. Predominantly, these days the securitization of migration refers to the security of the national welfare state (Spire 2008: 52) and its citizens that need to be protected from criminals, terrorists and other intruders (for an example Graham 2000: 186- 187). This reflects a statist way of understanding the security and migration nexus (for an analysis, see Gasper and Truong 2010: 10- 11). Where the threat to security is located depends heavily on the standpoint from which the analysis is conducted.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Unravelling security agendas of state and family: visas and bridewealth payments***

I approach the governance of marriage migration from the multiple perspectives of aspiring migrant women, state institutions and families. I refer to the significant influence and importance of the sphere of the family above all in two ways. First, members of family can be important in influencing, shaping or determining the life and migration trajectories of aspiring migrants. Migrants are thoroughly embedded within family networks and it is thus problematic to treat or think of migrants merely as individuals (Bakewell 2010: 1692).<sup>5</sup> As we shall see, family members can be key decision-makers or fundraisers (Stark & Bloom 1985: 174). Second, family norms and values constantly work to influence the choices and actions of aspiring migrants within their life trajectories. All aspiring migrants are always guided and informed by expectations and value systems of the family. Ideal type expectations of male and female bushfallers reveal standards and norms according to which families seek to regulate migration. The authority of the sphere of the family thus goes far beyond particular actions of individual members of family.

As we saw above, fraud and selfishness are important themes that emerge in relation to marriage migration and both are related to issues of security. When thinking about how security and marriage migration relate to one another it is important to consider a plurality of regulatory authorities with which aspiring migrant women deal within their trajectories. Both family and state struggle to secure licences for mobility. Yet, family, state and individual Cameroonian women often have different objectives in relation to mobility. In fact, how all three operate reflects different notions of the concept of security. I analyse the different concerns of state officials, families and individual women through the notion of security because it allows me to put these different regulatory authorities on the same level playing field (Ferguson 2006: 112). I thus do not presuppose that certain concerns

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4 Gasper and Truong are that the human security framework is particularly helpful for an analysis of migration for principally three reasons. First of all, the human security framework supports human rights concerns. Secondly, the human security approach goes beyond the Westphalian framework that considers states as the main actors and categories of analysis. Finally, the human security approach can be less individualistic than a mere human rights approach. As a conceptual lens, human security allows ample space for the importance of communities, families and identities (Gasper & Truong 2010: 14).

5 For a rich analysis of migrant connections to family networks, see Moors 2003; Fleischer 2009; Drohtbohm 2009 & 2010; Kastner 2010; König & de Regt 2010.



are more legitimate than others, but instead study how the respective legitimacy of certain concerns is constructed through accusations of fraud and selfishness.

One of the objectives of this thesis is to provide an analysis of the governance of migration that includes the state as an actor, but explicitly goes beyond the vision and perspective of the state. The state as both a set of institutions and an idea significantly shapes migration trajectories and the respective scope of control for aspiring migrants over the outcome of their migration trajectories. Visas are an important condition of possibility for geographical mobility. States fix the legal frameworks within which aspiring spouses can join each other across state borders. Yet, as I have argued in the introduction of this thesis, to pay attention to the state as an actor does not mean to take up the perspective of the state.

The border spectacle of marriage migration cannot be understood without an appreciation of how state actors have also created the need for this border spectacle. Love as the foundations of marital unions (Pateman 1988: 154-188; Finlay & Clarke 2003: 416; Spronk 2006: 213- 254) has become a source of suspicion for consulate officers at the very moment in which marriage has been constructed as one of the few avenues of emigration.<sup>6</sup>

To unravel multiple security agendas, this chapter will pay attention to visas and bridewealth payments. In very different ways, both visas and bridewealth payments constitute instruments of control over movement. State authorities give out visas upon having both studied papers and received money. The visa of a (deterritorial) state authority grants permission to a person to move from the country of origin to the country of the visa provider. Bridewealth payments, on the other hand, sanction marital unions. A bridewealth payment is necessary to convince the bride's family to allow the daughter to leave the household of her parents. Depending on the village of origin of the spouses, the family of the husband gives a certain amount of money, drinks, animals or other goods to members of the family of the wife. By confirming that the husband now has control over the sexuality and further movements of the spouse, a bridewealth payment licenses a woman to move to the household of the man. Both bridewealth payments and visas hence represent particular modes of control and regulation within the sphere of the state and the family respectively.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter explores security issues through the example of marriage related cases of migration because marriage holds the potential to blur boundaries of legal citizenship. Through marriage so called foreigners become and give birth to citizens. Thus, trajectories of marriage migration arouse a particularly strong set of suspicions at the level of state authorities. During my two weeks at the French consulate, I observed eight marriage interviews. Out of the 43 other visa interviews I observed, seven cases that were also related to issues of marriage. Marriage certificates are crucial elements of visa application processes. They can become

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<sup>6</sup> I thank Sebastien Chauvin for having pointed out these interlocked dynamics to me.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to reiterate that neither state nor family are bounded units that clash and contradict each other at all times. In fact, I will demonstrate that state effects cannot be understood without studying the sphere of the family and vice versa.

important for example to prove the status of the applicant or to certify the status of the relative in France whom the applicant wants to visit. Marriage as a particular type of family dependence is thus a crucial topic at Embassies, as well as for the ambition of mobility of women in Cameroon.

In relation to marriage visa interviews at the consulate, embassy staff and visa applicants ask themselves a set of security related questions.<sup>8</sup> Consulate staff rationalizes their work through a narrative of wanting to ensure the safety of their own citizens, as well as the body of the nation. At the same time, Internet-mediated marriages, marriages with foreigners and marriages with Cameroonians abroad are ways for Cameroonian women to achieve both social and geographical mobility. In a context in which the consequence of the structural adjustment programmes still endure; geographical mobility in Cameroon has become synonymous with social mobility and by extension greater human security for the future of the entire family. Consequently, women in Cameroon conceive of marriage migration in relation to their own understandings of what security entails.

### ***Money, sex and Internet-mediated marriages in Cameroon***

The most common representation and reference to Internet mediated marriage in Cameroon during my fieldwork period was a song called *njumboss*. (*Njumboss* is a slang word that refers to an elderly rich man.)<sup>9</sup> 'Mother, life in the village is difficult! I will go to town to try and build up my life.' These are the lyrics of the heroine of a popular song sung by the Cameroonian singer Erico.<sup>10</sup> The refrain goes 'njumboss@yahoo.fr' and the song was extremely popular in both Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon. 'Mother, I will surf on the Internet to find my white man – even if he has a snake.' 'I will send out photos on which I'm all naked. And even if the photos will be distributed all over the place... me I found him!' The heroine of the song is clear that she is the one who sought out her fate and is thus willing to accept the consequences. She willingly takes the risks that the white man to whom she refers as *njumboss* can turn into a snake that would over night either swallow her up or steal the eggs in her womb and thus make her infertile. She searches for her white man under the address of njumboss@yahoo.fr. A *njumboss* is a particular kind of man or boyfriend and is similar in meaning to the term *mboma* that refers to elderly married and rich men. Literally speaking, *mboma* means python.

Seeking out sugar daddies and white men - over the Internet or otherwise - is not free of dangers. Nevertheless, the community was rattled by at least one case per year where female university students - at the university where I did my fieldwork - put naked photos of themselves onto the Internet. In the case of the pop song, the strategy of the heroine is successful. After many hardships and struggles,

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8 What I call 'marriage visas' are technically speaking visas for family reunions.

9 *Njumboss* is a very recent term that emerged as a combination of *njumba* (boyfriend) and *boss* (big man). Some understand *njumboss* to refer to white old men or sugar daddies. The term *njumboss* can also refer itself to the women who date 'big men' such as sugar daddies or white old men.

10 For the complete lyrics, see annexe 4.

she eventually is able to increase her social status and finally leave the misery of the village for a better life not just in town, but also through her white husband potentially even abroad. Through the help of night-work and the Internet, the heroine gets married to a white man. 'I planted macabo, but nothing came of it. I planted yams, but nothing came of it. I even planted tomatoes, but nothing came of it. Me at a lamp post in Douala – that works.' In the music video, we can physically trace the changes in her social status. In the first scene, the heroine wears a wide-open kabbah (a wide open dress cut out of wax prints). Then later she is wearing leather boots and a tight black dress. Despite the potential disgrace of prostitution implied in the film clip, the heroine at the end of the film is dressed in a white wedding dress. The caption at the end of the video informs us that they 'lived happily ever after and had many mixed children.'

Although the heroine had taken risks, she had secured a white man without a snake. Through her marriage to the white man, her social status was secured.<sup>11</sup> The film illustrates the transformative power of marriage making up for anything else that had come before. In the song, marriage is a means for the heroine to finalise her quest for social mobility and greater security. The social status of marriage in general – but more specifically to a white man or a man in bush – can wipe out the potential disgrace of sex work.

Johnson-Hanks suggests that Cameroonian women seek Internet-mediated marriages not only as a sign of the new, but also as a means of attaining long-standing, 'traditional' elements of marriage that the economic crisis has made increasingly unattainable (2007: 642). Marriage to a 'white man massa' (white husband or boyfriend)<sup>12</sup> becomes a replacement for bridewealth.<sup>13</sup> Given current economic circumstances, it is ever more difficult for Cameroonian men to live up to the level of 'seriousness' that is expected of a potential husband. Income levels are so low that bridewealth payments are ever more difficult to finance. Cameroonian women furthermore like to know that their future husbands will be in a position to act as a breadwinner assuring a good standard of living and education for the children. Such dynamics are crucial for any discussion of marriage migration in Cameroon.

The likelihood for a Cameroonian woman to seek out marriage through the Internet depends on personal attitudes and views on marriage, courtship and sexuality. These attitudes and views partly depend on their respective social position.<sup>14</sup> Johnson-Hanks's analysis of Internet-marriages in Yaoundé focused specifically on a group of women that belong to a middle class (2007: 643). It is certainly not

<sup>11</sup> Nyamnjoh and Page demonstrate that this increase in social status can be ambiguous. At times, Cameroonians can look down on Cameroonian women who marry white men (Nyamnjoh and Page 2002: 624).

<sup>12</sup> Massa is Pidgin for 'man' and is derived from 'master'.

<sup>13</sup> Bridewealth payments are a transfer of goods or money from the kin of the groom to the kin of the bride. It's a practice that links the family of origin with the family of procreation. In the anthropological literature, bridewealth has often been explained as payment made in exchange for the bride's family's loss of her labour and fertility within her kin group. Through bridewealth, marriage is hence intrinsically linked to transfer of money or goods. For some key literature on marriage payments in Cameroon see (Guyer 1986; Ardener 1996: 176, 200 and 234; Brain 1972: 118- 131; Ogbu 1978).

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed study of sexuality and self-definitions amongst young professionals in Nairobi, see (Spronk 2006).

the poorest of Cameroonian women who would feel inclined to seek a husband through the Internet.

While an Internet-mediated marriage has become an important reference point for Cameroonian women with ambitions of mobility, this njumboss@yahoo.fr phenomenon needs to be seen in relation to both its legal and economic context. These days, physical mobility is one of the few access routes - particularly for women - for social mobility. Within a context of generalised imposed transcontinental immobility, money from bush is more than a means of payment; it is also an important source of security and status. In the case studies of this chapter, I hope to show that bush even becomes a currency through which (bridewealth) payments can be made.

Chances of being granted a visa are low outside the realm of marriage. Moreover, while job opportunities in Cameroon are scarce and often financially not very rewarding, they are often likely to compromise or challenge the physical and sexual integrity of women. Stories circulate with great frequency of young women asked to first sleep with their potential employer to secure employment. Referring to Nigeria, Smith talks about 'men in positions of power' that 'expect sex in exchange for employment, promotions, business contracts, or even just the promise of no further harassment' (Smith 2007: 80). While sexual exchanges with potential or current employers can secure a job, they put women at risk in other ways.

The njumboss song offers insights into the role, place and meaning of money in relation to both marriage and courtship.<sup>15</sup> The heroine sings: 'If you don't have money, stay where you are! Stay where you are! Stay where you are!' Consulate officers are aware of special hotels in Cameroon and Gabon where Cameroonian women supposedly work as prostitutes. Consulate officers believe that they often do this work in the hope of perhaps one day also being able to get married to a foreign citizen. Yet, very different ways of framing money in relation to sexual exchanges exist.<sup>16</sup>

While the film clip of the song is explicit in its reference to commercial sex work on the street, the song lyrics only once, through the word 'lamp post', refer to professional sex work. The importance of money in courtship practices in Cameroon is much more generic in its relevance. 'While love can also come in,' my research assistant Delphine would assure me, 'like a plant requires water, a woman will still always need money.' Money in this context becomes a sign of the seriousness of the respective suitor. There is no specific term that refers to money attained through sugar daddies or boyfriends. After all, 'money does not have a colour.' Who gave you the money or how you got the money does not matter. Internet-mediated marriages can thus only be understood within the context of what courtship and marriage stand for within the West African context in which matters of

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<sup>15</sup> For detailed studies on this theme in Nigeria and South Africa, see Cornwall (2002) and Hunter (2002).

<sup>16</sup> In this context it is important to also mention the social practice of honouring the female 'partner' with presents (Bouly de Lesdain 1999: 45). To be sponsored means to have sexual relations with one or several stable men against remuneration (Seraphin 2000: 170). For a woman to be 'sponsored' by a lover is a material gain. Even if the family benefits from these material gains, 'sponsorisation' might still remain morally suspicious. For the woman in question a gain in status plays itself off against moral dynamics.

exchange in courtship and marriage practices are often less framed by the ideology of love (Smith 2007: 79). Husbands have to be chosen according to where they can bring you – both in terms of social and geographical mobility. Money is the first indicator of this capacity.

In Cameroon, marriage constitutes a migration strategy for women, but less so for men. During my days at the consulate office, I did not observe an interview with a Cameroonian man who was planning to travel to France for marriage-related reasons. Consulate officers did not have the same set of accusations against Cameroonian men. In contrast to the few male cases presented, the marriage migration trajectories of Cameroonian women were mostly deeply inscribed in continuity to courtship and marriage strategies in Cameroon. In Cameroon, husbands pay bridewealth when bringing the woman from her family of origin into her new family of procreation. Men are expected to have a minimum amount of resources to enable the mobility of Cameroonian women.<sup>17</sup> In the Cameroonian context, marriage thus is a question of mobility for women and not for men.<sup>18</sup>

In countries of destination, marriage constitutes an important resource for both men and women. Fleischer demonstrates how undocumented migrants manage to legalize their stays through marriage (2010). Yet, as we shall later see, in the case of Cameroonian migrants abroad that already have residence permits, conceptions of bridewealth continue to influence attitudes towards marriage and the associated mobility of women. Even in this context, marriage is more important for the ambitions of mobility for women than for men. Distinctly different security agendas are at work when embassies investigate marriage migration.

## **State and Security**

### ***French consulate: securing paper, money and mobility***

In visa application processes in connection to marriage migration, French consulate officers determined whether: a) the legality of the papers that have been submitted has been confirmed: and b) whether the marriage intentions of the

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<sup>17</sup> Goheen describes a trend for women in the Grassfields to choose to stay single, rather than to marry, because the burden of having to supply most of the necessities of life to the husband is perceived too high (Goheen 1996: 180; 185). Many men can no longer expect to marry and found a family, since they have no capital or credit to offer a dowry (Roitman 2004: 95). Women have to wait as men can't always afford marriage (Seraphin 2000: 197).

<sup>18</sup> The few cases of Cameroonian men that I came across in Cameroon who wanted to travel (and potentially migrate) through the help of marriage were driven by other logics than the ones of courtship and marriage in Cameroon. A deported neighbour of mine asked me for a marriage certificate and offered 1.000.000 CFA (roughly 1.500 Euros) in return. The two migration brokers with whom I worked both at one point suggested that they would appreciate a 'marriage of convenience' with me. It was implied that this would be a welcome return token on my part in exchange for the research that I was allowed to carry out with them.

Cameroonian bride pose a problem. My ethnographic analysis of visa application processes in relation to marriage migration includes both an analysis of paper and an analysis of marriage interviews. I will first discuss how staff at the French consulate seeks to govern papers and then how they seek (amongst others through papers) to control love.

‘Even though we know that they [i.e. Cameroonian women] are only waiting for French nationality in order to be able to disappear into thin air,’ complained one officer at the French consulate, ‘once they are married, there is nothing else that we can do.’ In the view of this consulate officer, instruments of control at her disposal are limited. She explained that legally speaking, few reasons for refusals of visas of spouses of citizens exist. All French citizens have ‘liberty of union’ and are thus free to marry the person of their own choice. According to the officer, the only power she had to make sure that administrative procedures were followed.

Consulate officers sought to establish sharp distinctions between the supposedly ‘fake’ (referred to as ‘faux’ in French) and the supposedly ‘true’. Anything that was different from French norms risked being classified ‘fake’. In the case of marriage visas, matters were furthermore complicated as Cameroonian state papers needed to be incorporated into the (in this case French) state apparatus. Once the marriage was found legal, the papers of the Cameroonian spouse became part of the body of knowledge of the French state. French citizens were not allowed to marry Cameroonians with ‘fake’ papers. To prevent not only the integration of ‘fake’ papers, but by extension of ‘fake’ people, the ‘truthfulness’ of marriage intentions had to be tested in an interview at the embassy. The function of these interviews was to police the boundaries of who can be and become a French citizen.

In principle, in the case of family reunions for spouses, visas were automatically granted – yet under the administrative condition that the marriage had been officially transcribed in France. This transcription could take a long time if the couple married itself exclusively in accordance with Cameroonian state regulations. Thus, the French consulate service recommended all couples first seek a *certificat de capacité de mariage* with the French consulate service before marrying before Cameroonian authorities.<sup>19</sup> To gain this *certificat de capacité de mariage*, the Cameroonian spouse had, among other things, to pass a marriage interview with the French consulate service in Yaoundé. In this interview, the consulate officer verified whether papers in the file had been legalized, i.e. recognized by French authorities as legal and true.<sup>20</sup>

In the context of these legalisation procedures, Cameroonian staff of the French embassy is sent to the respective town halls throughout the country. With only the registration number of the document in question, the Cameroonian staff was asked to look up and copy all the information contained within the respective document. If the information in the registry of the town hall was identical with the

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19 French citizens who want to marry abroad need to obtain prior to their marriage a certificate that proves that he or she has fulfilled all formal requirements on the part of the French state. In the case of marriage abroad without a *certificat de capacité de mariage*, all transcriptions of marriages necessarily include an interview.

20 These papers include amongst others proof of nationality, birth certificates and proof of residence.

information given by the person in question, the French authorities determined that the paper was legal and true. Any inconsistency led to the conclusion that the paper was illegal and 'faux'.

The legalization processes through which papers (above all birth certificates) were authenticated reveal both the power and impotence of the, in this case, French state authority. On the one hand, French consulate authorities refused to recognize a priori the validity of papers issued by Cameroonian authorities. On the other hand, legalization processes determined the legality of a piece of paper by comparing it to other pieces of paper that were issued by the same Cameroonian state authorities.

While the non-recognition of a piece of paper constituted an acute burden for visa applicants, legalisation processes themselves were somewhat circular processes. In some cases, Cameroonian applicants could challenge and overcome prior judgments of their papers as illegal by hiring a lawyer who would conduct enquiries and issue a *jugement suppletif*. The introduction of this *jugement suppletif* as an alternative way of establishing the legality of (birth) certificates partly responds to the volatility of the basis on which the above legalization processes come to their conclusions. A privately paid fee for a *jugement suppletif* could pave the way to the legalisation of a piece of paper. In this case, the financial costs for the advocate were considered a fee and not a price.

In conversation with me, consulate staff estimated that about 70 percent of all papers, documents and certificates they received in general visa applications were fraud. In the case of marriage migration, French consulate officers feared that Cameroonian women would declare to have children that were not biologically theirs. They also feared that Cameroonian women were still married to other men without having properly gone through a formal divorce.

Consulate officers took any unclarity or potential contradiction between pieces of information as points of suspicion that spoke against the honest and good intentions of the aspiring migrant. In this analytical move, consulate staff assumed that the Cameroonian state produced forms of documentation for its citizens that were comparable and/or compatible with the regulatory demands of its own regime of stateness. While incompatibilities and points of incoherence within forms of documentation were mostly assumed to be a sign of bad-will on the part of the visa applicants, Cameroonian visa applicants could at times also have incoherent papers because of the ways in which Cameroonian state administrations function. Within a context of suspicion at embassies, there was little space for interpreting incoherence as the consequence of bureaucratic error.<sup>21</sup> Mistakes could occur within any state administration and particularly so if the level of training and education of bureaucrats is relatively low.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> A consulate officer at the French embassy explicitly told me that she did not care whether or not a visa applicant in front of her was the victim of her own state administration. Her role, she told me, was to enforce the regulatory requirements of the French state.

<sup>22</sup> In the case of Delphine's identity card, the respective officer copied the profession of her mother into the wrong field. Thus Delphine has since the age of sixteen been by profession not a student, but a 'housewife'.

Constant suspicion and accusations of fraud thus need to be understood within a context in which aspiring migrants were dealing with two forms of stateness – one territorial and deterritorial. Procedures to obtain different kinds of papers (e.g. marriage certificates) are different within different state cultures. Inconsistencies and tensions will arise for any mobile person trying to reconcile administrative demands from two different state authorities. Even for highly educated people that are accustomed to high levels of bureaucracy, marriage migration could create situations of deadlock and impossibility. Given the complexity of the various regulatory demands of different state authorities, de facto complete adherence to rules constitutes the miracle.

Despite the contingencies involved in the determination of whether or not pieces of paper are authenticated as legal or faux, birth certificates were key for marriage visa applications. As the officer explained to me: 'I refuse [to grant permission] because I do not know whom I have in front of me.' One of the marriage interviews that I attended involved a young woman. She was pregnant from her fiancé with whom she lived in Cameroon. She was not applying for a visa, but for the *certificat de capacité de mariage*. They refused her the *certificat de capacité de mariage* because her birth certificate had been established as illegal. She was guilty of having handed in a birth certificate that did not meet the requirements of the French consulate and she was obliged to wait. She could not marry her French husband before giving birth to her child.<sup>23</sup> We were all in the same room: the young pregnant woman, the consulate officer and me. Yet, the officer considered the selection of pieces of information generated within a birth certificate to be the most reliable access route to truth – which in this case was the reality of who was sitting in front of the consulate officer in the room. What mattered was legal and not social personhood. The spectacle of border enforcement that marked Cameroonian women as security threats also constituted part of a struggle to institute the legitimacy of certain access paths to truthfulness over others on which state authorities could draw to exert their authority.

The enormous transfer of authority to paper needs to be considered in relation to some of the circumstances in which all papers are produced. Delphine told me that at the age of five she had complained bitterly that she could not yet go to school. She had not yet reached the official age for school and her elder brother went to the town hall. For a mere 5,000 CFA (about eight Euros; which is the standard amount of money to be given for a birth certificate), he was granted a birth certificate that would allow Delphine to go to school as desired. For all official purposes, the date noted on the birth certificate became her date of birth. For her passport application, Delphine used the birth certificate that had allowed her to go to school. The legality of the paper did not pose a problem with Cameroonian state authorities. Yet, if one day she would want to marry a European, the history of the production of her birth certificate could backfire. Neither Delphine, nor I know

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23 If the couple had married without the certificate and thus exclusively with Cameroonian state authorities, the transcription of their marriage certificate would have taken a longer time because marriage without the *certificat de capacité de mariage* are more suspicious to French state officials than those conducted with the certificate.



about the paper traces of her two birth certificates that may still be within the registry of the town hall in Buea. Within the paper and non-computerised records of the town hall, it would be extremely difficult to trace whether or not a person had already gotten a birth certificate prior to applying for another one.

Zelizer's work on different social meanings of money in different contexts can be useful to unravel the puzzle (1997). In her work, she demonstrates how money marks social relations and how social relations mark money (see also Bloch and Parry 1989: 19). 'Multiple monies in the modern world may not be as visibly identifiable as the shells, coins, brass rods or stones of primitive communities, but their invisible boundaries work just as well' (1994: 24). Money can for example come in the form of a fee, of a bribe, of a bridewealth payment, as a price or as a gift. Consulate offices might reject bridewealth payments as a traditional evil that was even further aggravated by the impact of money. Yet, the families of the spouse might frame the very same transfer of money as a legitimate procedure that seals and thus secures a marital union. Just as some security agendas are taken more seriously than others, some framings of monetary transactions also seem more natural or legitimate than others. Conflicting views on whether a transfer of money in exchange for papers is understood by aspiring migrants and consulate officers as paying a price, a fee or a bribe are key to open up for analysis the way in which the legitimacy of different regulatory authorities is constructed.

One of the consulate officers managed to capture well the ironies involved within paper regimes of regulation. When she told applicants that their papers were illegal, she complained to me, 'It doesn't disturb them. They will go and buy another one.' The officer was horrified to find that Cameroonians perceived paper acquisition from state authorities as 'buying papers'. Yet, the social meaning of money was not fixed (Zelizer 1997; Parry & Bloch 1989; Guyer 1995; Maurer 2006). The distinction between money paid to a lawyer for a *jugement suppletif* and money for a certificate given to a Cameroon office worker was not self-evident. The framing of both payments as fees legitimised the forms of paper production that both lawyers and state officials use. Yet, in both cases, papers were produced and the production of paper was connected to financial transfers.

As laid out in the preceding chapter, money was always involved in forms of (bureaucratic) paper production. Yet, some money transfers in exchange for papers were framed as fees and some as price. These framings construct some financial transfers as legitimate and others as potentially illegitimate. Papers deemed the product of illegitimate financial exchanges were referred to as fraud. Papers from fees were deemed legitimate sources of truthfulness. The demarcation of some forms of paper production as fraudulent contributed to the construction of the legitimacy of state authorities. Narratives of fraud and accusations of dishonesty and lying were part and parcel of attempts to enforce and re-establish a monopoly position for state authorities.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter on general visa application processes, the very labelling of certain transfers of money as fees and of others as bribes is an attempt to establish authority over what constitutes legitimate modes of paper production and what does not. The French consulate office stressing that birth cer-

tificates have to be singular and immaculate expressed both a desire and an anxiety on the part of the state to identify its citizens and non-citizens and to govern and manage them accordingly.

### ***French consulate: securing marriage, love and citizens***

Beside the issue of the legality of birth certificates and other documents, the marriage interview also served to test the marriage intentions of the Cameroonian spouse, as well as to gather information on the case for the unlikely scenario that the *certificat de capacité de mariage* would be denied on these grounds. These interviews have become compulsory since March 2007. The interviews were designed to check for lies and inconsistencies within and between the narrative, the documents and the data that already stored on the applicants within the computer system from prior visa application processes. The information was complied and tested for internal coherency, as well as compared with computer data that might have been entered upon a prior visa application of the aspiring Cameroonian spouse. Some of the women knew that they were coming for an interview, others were taken by surprise.

During fieldwork, I observed eight marriage interviews. The interviews were held within the main administrative building of the Embassy and the officer in charge was part of the diplomatic staff.<sup>24</sup> The officer who allowed me to observe the interviews was a woman in her mid 50s. In what follows, I will concentrate on the case of one woman in particular. I had never met Claire before the interview, nor did I see her again afterwards. All that I know of her case stems from the moment of the interview itself. The focus of the analysis will be on the communication dynamics between officer and visa applicant, rather than on the marriage and migration trajectory of Claire herself.

'When and how did you meet?' 'Where?' 'Did he write to you first or you?' 'How did it go?' 'When did you start talking on the phone?' 'Was the website geared towards French men or could a Cameroonian man also have responded to your add?' The consulate officers asked question after question and noted down all of Claire's answers into the computer file. From the answers that Claire gave throughout the interview, I gathered that Claire had put her profile on a dating website (called [www.chichou.com](http://www.chichou.com)) with the explicit purpose of getting married. After two months of online correspondence, Claire started to talk over the phone with her fiancé. Two years later, they decided to get married. Claire is in her 30s. Her fiancé is in his 40s and already has one child from a former marriage. The couple had not yet met in person.

'Are you sure it's the man of your life?' 'Who talked first about marriage?' 'If it does not work out, will you come back to Cameroon? What will you do if it does not work out?' After a short pause, Claire delivered the correct answer. 'I will go back home.' The officer nodded contently, wrote down the answers and contin-

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<sup>24</sup> By contrast, non-immigration visa interviews are conducted mostly by locally employed French staff in a reception space at the entrance of the Embassy.

ued to check further details. 'What is your future husband's address?' Telephone number? Job? Salary? Claire laughed in a shy manner. The officer said that it's normal to know the salary of your future husband. Claire thus overcame her inhibition and told us that it was one- thousand nine-hundred and six Euros and thirty-three cents. The officer gave me a side-look. She later explained that the woman in question 'ha[d] prepared well for her interview.'

The encounters between the consulate officer and the Cameroonian women were fundamentally pre-structured and predetermined through the interview questions and its inherent assumptions. A great deal of rather intimate data was gathered, although much of it was rarely used for denials. The only real turning point at which Claire could have lost access to the *certificat de capacité de mariage* was when the officer asked her about her prior travel projects. She had never travelled before in her life. 'Have you ever asked for a visa before?' asked the officer. The first reply of the woman was to deny this. The officer looked at her computer screen and asked again. 'No? Are you sure? This is a crucial question.' After a little bit more insistence on the part of the officer, the woman changed her response. She 'admitted' to having asked for a visa with the French Consulate in 2002. At that time, she tried to go for training with an NGO, but the visa had been denied. 'We are here to arrange this marriage. Be honest with me and I will be honest with you,' the officer explained and continued to compare the new information with data on the computer from prior visa applications. The officer was checking for 'lies'. There was no 'lie' in that file and thus this prior application did not block Claire in her current procedure.

The question catalogue continued. After having gone through Claire's employment history and the couple's marriage plans, future life prospects were examined. 'What will you do with your child in Cameroon?' 'If you want to have children in France, where will you keep them?' 'Have you already spoken with the mother of your future husband on the phone?' During a prior marriage interview with a French male citizen resident in Cameroon, the officer had excused herself for having to ask certain questions. In this prior case, the couple was living together and the woman was expecting a child. The French husband was present during the interview. Upon seeing the stomach of the woman, the officer had exclaimed: 'That says it all!' Childbirth automatically validated the supposed love that motivated and founded the marital union.

At the end of the interview, the officer printed out the interview material and asked Claire to sign the document. The interview was over. As Claire got up, she asked a question. The meaning of her question was not immediately clear, but then she understood that the fiancé would soon be coming to Cameroon. She had scheduled this appointment in the hope of being able to get married when he visited her. The consulate officer was taken by surprise. 'You did not tell me everything!' she exclaimed in an annoyed tone. Thirty minutes of intense questioning had not allowed for space for the woman to unfold her story. The time had been structured by the consulate officer's questions and she had not anticipated the fiancé of this woman to be so committed to the marriage to have already booked a flight. While the officer was visibly beginning to look at the matter in a much more

positive light, she explained that there is little she can do to speed up the legalisation processes of the documents of the Cameroonian fiancé. Yet, she had a warmer and friendlier voice. A first layer of suspicion had been eliminated.

At the French consulate office, visas in relation to marriage with a French citizen come under particularly strong suspicion. As the supposed ideal type of disinterested love is never made explicit, all marriages to white men become directly associated with fraud. This becomes evident in the posters with which I opened this chapter.

Within the midst of his divorce, a French husband wrote in an email posted on the walls of the consulate:

*My life has been destroyed by these women without any faith or scruples that only wish to enter France for reasons of nationality to then send back the money of their white husband to Yaoundé. [...] I have been the victim of extortions from the staircase of the airplane right through to my return. I've paid my worthless marriage certificate with two bottles of Whisky and 50,000 CFA' (roughly 80 Euros).<sup>25</sup>*

Based on one particular case, all Cameroonian women in this e-mail poster were portrayed as entirely instrumental and thus implicitly contrasted to supposedly love-driven and vulnerable French citizens. All that Cameroonian women were said to want is citizenship, driving licences, allocations and the capacity to bring over family members.

*A well-organized network in France (with its centre in Paris) informs your beautiful Cameroonian ladies about any possible allocations. Without scruple or love, they know more about social benefits than the French. One goal only: to send as much money as possible to Africa.<sup>26</sup>*

In this email, responsibilities and obligations towards families of origin were dressed up as greed.<sup>27</sup> Appalled by such interest-driven behaviour, the French man who was in the midst of his divorce discredits his former wife of any form of love and emotion and concludes his mail:

*The 'white sweetheart' is but a good – just as the conceived and nationalized children of course. They don't stop at anything. Know that a wife who is not found suitable in Cameroon is immediately and without explanation sent back and divorced; thus imagine how information on French social protection is received!?! In France it's a*

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<sup>25</sup> 'Ma vie est détruite pour ces femmes sans foi ni loi qui ne souhaitent que rentrer en France pour la nationalité et envoyer tout l'argent de leur 'blanc' à Yaoundé. J'ai été racketté de l'escalier de l'avion jusqu'au retour. J'ai payé mes actes de mariage 'bidon' contre deux bouteilles de Whisky et 50.000 Francs CFA.'

<sup>26</sup> 'Un réseau fort bien organisé en France, (le noyau dur à Paris) renseigne vos belles Camerounaises sur toutes les prestations disponibles. Sans scrupule et sans amour, elles en savent plus que les français en terme d'allocations. Un seul but: envoyer le plus d'argent possible en Afrique.'

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the commodification process is supposed to operate exactly opposite to the discourse of mail order brides.

*divorce without end. They don't mind to have sex during three or five years pretending to be in love!!!*<sup>28</sup>

Since the love of his wife was fake, the statement of this former husband implies that the marriage had never been truly consumed. Only sex with true love intentions validates a marriage. He labelled his marriage as a *marriage blanc*, i.e. a marriage that is fake. He called his marriage invalid because the supposed ideal type of totally disinterested love did not drive it.

In this light, the types of social regulations applicable within the legal system in France to cases of divorce seem exaggerated and unnecessary to the author of the e-mail. The French husband called for a greater convergence of the authority of husband and state. In the context of the French consulate, love is also the narrative that renders invisible the interests of the French state. Only those women are allowed into the body of French citizens who convincingly disavow prior loyalties to their family of origin and thus promise to become good and safe citizens by submitting - in the name of love - their own sense of initiative and autonomy to their new husband in France.

The above discussion illuminates that legal frameworks of state regulation always express and seek to impose certain gendered norms and specific family conceptions (for a more detailed discussion of how different dimensions of state power are not gender-neutral, see Brown 2007). The sphere of the state is deeply infused with family norms.<sup>29</sup> Laws reflect gender values of given states and societies, as well as larger global economic developments (Van Walsum forthcoming). After 1961, for example, Cameroonians that wanted to travel were required by the newly independent state structures to apply for exit visas. Married women who applied for these exit visas required the written authorisation of their husbands.<sup>30</sup> In the context of marriage migration and security issues, it becomes important to

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28 'Le 'chéri blanc' n'est qu'une marchandise, tout comme les enfants conçus et nationalisés bien sûr. Elles ne reculent devant rien. Sachez qu'une femme qui ne convient pas, au Cameroun, est répudiée sur le champ sans explication, alors imaginez l'information sur la protection sociale française!?! En France c'est un divorce interminable. Et elles s'en fichent de coucher pendant trois ou cinq ans en faisant semblant d'être amoureuse!!!'

29 During the British mandate, colonial officials responded in similar situations very differently to demands on the part of family members for repatriation. In a letter a younger brother wrote in 1953 to colonial authorities (welfare officer) about his long lost brother who keeps refusing to come back home and fulfil his family responsibilities. In this case, the answer from the District Officer in Victoria was as follows: 'You must understand that it is impossible to force any person to return to his home against his will. If your brother is unwilling to return to you of his own free will, there is nothing you or the government can do.' (Tc (1953) 1 Buea) In the case of women and particularly so when in connection to prostitution, the official response could be quite different. Concerning a woman who has left her husband, but is refusing to return 'home' to her parents, the District officer in Victoria writes in 1953: 'Under the Native Authority Ordinance this woman can be compelled to go home and fined if she disobeys.' Her ex-husband had mentioned in his letter to the authorities that his woman had started to 'misbehave' and instead of returning home to her father 'chose to be a prostitute.' (Tc (1953) 1 Buea)

30 The decree n 62-DF-23 of the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1962 instituted the federal passport and introduced other forms of regulation for the emigration of Cameroonians from the territory of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. So as to obtain an exit visa, Cameroonians leaving the country needed for example to pay 50.000 CFA to the Cameroon Treasury. This money was to 'guarantee' the 'repatriation' of the person asking for the exit visa. To obtain a passport it was required to be in possession of a birth certificate, a certification of nationality, a tax certificate and married women needed the authorization of the husband and a copy of their marriage certificate (Tb (1954) 4 Buea). Those travelers with official orders of mission, administrative agents or people in possession of a return ticket were exempted from this regulation. Today, the conditions for granting (issuing) of passport and exit of nationals are provided by decree Nr. 90/1245 of 24

critically analyse which particular set of family norms is assumed and promoted by both consulate officers and family members of aspiring migrant women. It is also within these struggles over multiple understandings of family norms and womanhood that diverging, as well as converging security agendas express themselves.

Finally, marriage can never be the union of two individuals only, regardless of the cultural and geographical context. The need to secure French citizenship leaves out of the picture that inter-Cameroonian marriages also have to struggle through important issues of conflicting loyalties between families of origin and families of procreation. This chapter will examine an example of this in the upcoming discussion of the case of Nuretta.

It is perhaps this overt stress on individuality that has given rise to a very widespread myth in Cameroon about marriage in bush. Accustomed to a multitude of marital unions (legal, religious and traditional), Delphine and others would repeatedly insist and defy any doubt on my part: 'In Europe, they have contract marriages.' She would explain to me that contract marriage in Europe are signed and after a few years (when you have your papers) cancelled again. Delphine's belief in contract marriage in Europe helps to see marital unions in a different light. Marriage in Europe today relies on the legal form of a contract and is predominantly based on the union of two individuals (rather than families). By definition, a contract can also get annulled again. Whether the money transferred in exchange for the marriage certificate was a fee or a price does not matter, as ultimately the marriage was only a contract between two individuals.

Implicit assumptions on love and selfishness that set the tone in the consulate section similarly diffuse the case of Claire. Claire was under suspicion during the interview for being Cameroonian and having vested interest and loyalties with her family of origin. Yet, in the case of a marital failure or breakup, she was also expected to return 'home' to Cameroon.<sup>31</sup> While the marriage interview tested love by gathering information on the past and future plans of the couple and their level of familiarity with each other, it is *de facto* relatively rare that the data actually is used for visa decisions. The extended efforts put into recording large amounts of rather intimate information ought to thus be seen as part of the production of a spectacle.

So far, I hope to have demonstrated how consulates create through constant accusations of 'fraud' a spectacle of border enforcement. Constant accusations of fraud serve to legitimize certain versions of marriage and to delegitimize others. Emphasis on prior and parallel loyalties on the part of the Cameroonian female spouse is deemed as selfish. Accusations of selfishness (but then in a very different sense) are also important within the regulatory framework of the family that I shall discuss more closely in the following section. For the sake of comparison, I shall first lay out the regulative framework for issues of marriage related mobility at the U.S. consulate in Yaoundé.

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august 1990. The ordinary passport is issued by the Delegate General of National Security or by Head of Cameroon's Diplomatic and Consular Missions Abroad.

<sup>31</sup> Claire is exposed to entirely contradictory expectations here. She has to convince the officer in front of her both that she is and that she is not attached to her family of origin in Cameroon.

***The bureaucratic production of fraud and selfishness at the U.S. consulate***

When I stepped behind the window where visa applications are conducted in the U.S. consulate, I found entire tables covered with marriage photos ascertained as 'fake'. Most of these 'fake' marriages are between Cameroonians in Cameroon with Cameroonians that either have residence permits in the U.S. or had won the D.V. visa lottery. The two Cameroonian staff of the anti-fraud unit of the U.S. Embassy took their turn to show me the best and most obviously 'fake' marriage photos. Often the photo editing is visible at first sight. Proportions, scales and physical space do not fit neatly together. Other times, the 'fake-ness' of the photo seems less obvious. Yet, the two officers eagerly point out to me how this or that pose is not at all 'natural'.

Visas for applicants whose spouse is already in the U.S. are largely processed in the U.S. itself. More visible for me at the Embassy in Yaoundé were cases of marriage in relation to diversity lottery visa applications.<sup>32</sup> These visas are immigrant visas. The lucky winners of the diversity visa programme still have to go through an application process after having won the lottery. The lottery winners are only granted their visa if they can prove to fulfill all conditions and requirements that are attached to the D.V. lottery. Requirements on educational background and professional experience are relatively low. If officers detect 'fraud', the visa will not be granted.

Most commonly, 'fraud' is detected in relation to family dependants and spouses. Any spouse or dependent of a diversity visa lottery winner automatically gains immigration rights. Family connections come under tight scrutiny. At times, consulate officers carry out extended investigations in the places of birth of applicants and their dependents. If consulate officers 'detect' an element of fraud in the application, neither the D.V. winner nor his or her dependent (i.e. spouse or children) will go to the U.S.

In the case of applicants who have married after having played the lottery, consulate officers proceed to closely investigate.<sup>33</sup> The Cameroonian staff that works within the fraud prevention unit of the embassy conducts split interviews with both spouses. In these interviews, the spouses are separately interviewed on the nature of their union. Future plans of the couple as well as living arrangements were also tested.

These investigations are complemented by a general visa interview by an American born U.S. consulate officer who then either grants or refuses the visa. While at the consulate office, I observed several interviews and refusals of this nature.

*'Is this your true wife? I believe that you are legally married, but is it your true love? Did you marry her because of love or because you wanted to immigrate together? Is*

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<sup>32</sup> As pointed out in the preceding chapter, the U.S. government issues every year a limited number of visas through a programme called diversity visa lottery.

<sup>33</sup> A minimum of one year passes between the visa lottery entry and the actual departure for the U.S.

*your real intention to spend the rest of your lives together, or rather to immigrate to the U.S. together?*<sup>34</sup>

If the U.S. consulate officer determines that the marriage was only for immigration purposes, but not for love, then the marriage certificate can be considered invalid and the visa can be denied. If at this moment the lottery winner insists that the woman standing next to him is his 'true wife,' but prior investigations of the anti fraud unit have already produced evidence to the contrary, then the U.S. officer will not only refuse the visa, but also sign a 6C1 form.

This form amounts to a ten-year ban on entry to U.S. for the respective applicant for having used 'fraud.' This is the ultimate tool of punishment available to the consulate officers. Yet, as we shall see in the case of Josephine, the effects of such a form of punishment are minimal for those who have never been granted a visa from an American consulate office. What does the marriage security nexus look like from the perspective of family networks? This chapter will now turn to the cases of Josephine and Nuretta, with complementary elements from Delphine's case.

## **Family and security**

Before I ever met Josephine, she had tried four times in a row to leave the country. All four times her attempts had faltered. In all her attempts, courtship and marriage were crucial. I was first introduced to Josephine by one of her boyfriends, a lecturer at the University of Yaoundé. Josephine was in her mid 20s and had just finished her Bachelor dissertation. During her entire university studies, Josephine had been what in Cameroon is called self-sponsored. Her parents in Bali (an Anglophone village in the North West Province) were farmers and could not afford to send her to university in Yaoundé. Yet, as a young and smart woman, she had learned to find means to receive enough money from various men so as that she could complete her studies.

In the first year of her university studies, Josephine gave 500,000 CFA to the same broker with whom her boyfriend had been able to fall bush a few months earlier. The remaining two million CFA were to be given upon arrival in Belgium. The 500,000 CFA had been raised through the men in her life. While her boyfriend had been able to travel with the help of this broker, Josephine herself did not

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34 This quote stems from a visa application interview within the context of a diversity lottery winner. A distinction needs to be drawn between the way in which marriage figures for immigrant and non-immigrant visas. For the U.S. Embassy, my observations on the ways in which applicants and consulate officers invoke marriage are limited to non-immigrant visas and to diversity lottery visas. I thus do not have ethnographic material on how marriage to U.S. citizens or Cameroonian nationals with residence rights in the U.S. figure in relation to standard immigrant visa application processes.



receive anything in return for her money. The broker disappeared into thin air. Her first bushfelling attempt had failed. Yet, her motivation to try and fall bush remained. Retrospectively, Josephine explains to me her desire for bush in the following manner:

*The thing is, one always has that feeling that when you go to bush, you can bring down mountains. You can form a river in the desert. You just have the impression that when you go to bush, your family's future, your success, your family's brightness is assured. You just feel like when you go to bush even you as an individual, you change status. You become somebody.*

Four years later, her cousin who is a medical doctor won the Diversity Lottery. To help Josephine, the cousin and Josephine got a marriage certificate together.

*He just called me one day that I should come and let's go and sign some papers. But we did not go and sign any paper in any court or in any council. The papers were brought at home and we just signed them there. And then we went and took two pictures. That was all. So, I didn't even know how he was going about the thing.*

At that point, Josephine felt confident that she was now able to go to bush. In anticipation of her departure, Josephine stopped going to classes.

*I just knew that okay, fine, it's D.V. It's lottery and anybody who wins lottery goes. [...] Those are some of the things that made me to [delay] my school. Because at one time when you are going to school and there is this bush thing that comes, you are just like ok fine, by the end of this year I'm going to bush, why should I go to school. You stay without going to school. Again waiting for your bush to come. And bush never comes.*

Eventually the U.S. Embassy turned down the visa for both Josephine and her cousin. When the cousin received the decision, he did not inform Josephine immediately. Josephine only found out when she asked her cousin many months after the final decision of the consulate. Her second opening to bush had closed down.

Two years later, an ex-boyfriend of Josephine, from her village of origin in Bali, called her up from the U.S. He had first asked Josephine to send her documents to him so that he could get admission for her in a school in the U.S., but Josephine had not followed up on that request. The Bali boy became angry over this, but called after some time again. Josephine remembered how he had told her that he really loved her and now wanted to settle down. She remembered how he reasoned that 'it is preferable to settle with somebody you have always known than somebody you just met.' He told her that he did not trust girls in the U.S., and Josephine accepted the engagement proposal: 'I said ok. I just said okay. At least now I have a bush boyfriend.'

During the time of their engagement, Josephine explained to me how her fiancé was always afraid that perhaps she was already married. As a proof of her seriousness, the Bali man asked Josephine to provide him with her 'electronic passport' (i.e. e-mail password). Josephine at first refused, but after insistence from her brother who was favouring this engagement to a bushfeller from their

village of origin, Josephine gave in and the Bali man was thus able to read all her e-mail communications.<sup>35</sup>

When Josephine asked the Bali boy when he could come to Cameroon, he said it was not possible. Once he had made sure that people in Josephine's family would be in a position to finance her trip to the U.S., he put Josephine in touch with a friend who had just won the D.V. lottery. A wedding of convenience to this friend was supposed to allow Josephine entry to the U.S. Finally arrangements for the paper wedding with her fiancé's friend who had won the D.V. lottery were made, but then Josephine was lucky to win the D.V. lottery herself. Looking back at her engagement with the Bali boy, Josephine speculated that he did not have his residence permit in the U.S.

Josephine dropped her engagement with the Bali boy amongst others because he had failed to prove his seriousness. Money is an important proof of seriousness for Josephine. That is why she was also not interested in looking for a white husband over the Internet. 'We talk the language of CFA here. If whites don't give money, then my family will die.' Yet, the Bali fiancé had been giving her even less money than an ordinary boyfriend in Cameroon would have. He had once asked her, for example, to cook for her future in-laws. The money that he had sent for the food was not sufficient for a meal. Josephine laughed as she told me how she just used the money to drink with her girlfriends. She later took money from one of her mbomas (an older man with financial resources whom she was dating) and cooked for her supposed in-laws.

Even though she did not receive financial support, her family-in-law were suspicious of her. They were jealous and thought that they were not receiving money because the Bali boy was sending his money to Josephine. 'They just know that I'm married to a bushfaller,' complained Josephine to me.

When playing the D.V. lottery, Josephine had chosen to submit the form with the address of a family member who lived in the U.S. Josephine's cousin, who is a medical doctor and with whom she had attempted a marriage when he had earlier won the lottery, had provided Josephine with the address. Given the unreliable nature of postal services in Cameroon, it is a common practice for those who play the lottery to submit their application with addresses abroad. It is even said that a foreign address heightens one's chances of winning in the lottery. Therefore, the news that Josephine had won the lottery first reached the brother of her cousin in the U.S. who then communicated the message to her cousin in Cameroon without informing Josephine directly. Josephine explained: 'He just told him that you see, now Josephine has won this D.V. stuff so you guys are just supposed to hook up so that you can travel together and that will be beneficial for the family.'

Josephine's cousin in Cameroon developed a strategy for Josephine's diversity lottery application that would make her migration trajectory as desirable as possible for the entire family. Josephine was to marry a younger brother of the cousin with whom she was previously going to go to the U.S. Josephine explained:

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35 Her bush fiancé asked her for her password for her email account as a sign of seriousness and truthfulness. Hence, it was not possible for her to create a new account and pass on the password of this fake email account to her fiancé.

*The decision was not mine. [...] Immediately that I had won the lottery had been announced, the question was with whom I would get married. And if I had now wanted to start arguing with them, they would have said that I'm wicked. So, I didn't even want to try arguing.*<sup>36</sup>

Although one of her aunts did not agree with her cousin's decision, Josephine felt obliged to make a marriage certificate with her cousin. Josephine was afraid of being accused of 'selfishness'. 'You cannot deny or change them. They will just say that you are selfish and that you don't want other family members to prosper.'

Refusing a marriage arrangement would have been interpreted as an unacceptable act of selfishness on the part of Josephine that goes against the welfare of the family. She did not feel that she could put the security of her own mobility over the access to mobility of others in her family. Delphine noted that she would have never accepted a cousin's decision over her own D.V. lottery; yet, Josephine in her own case did not feel that she had a choice. Selfishness is a strong accusation and the perception that one is trying to prevent the prosperity of others can draw witchcraft into one's sphere. At the same time, complying with the demands of her cousin put Josephine in conflict with the regulatory requirements of the U.S. consulate.

Josephine and her cousin filed their visa application together. To prove the authenticity of their marital union, they also made photos. Josephine gave me a few of these photos. She and her cousin posed in a public garden in Yaoundé as a couple. When I asked Josephine about their decision to make both a marriage certificate and the photos that show evidence of the bridewealth payment, Josephine explained the following:

*Is it a matter of making decisions? It's like... you know you have these papers that come? And when you win they send you this document and in that document you have a list of things that you are supposed to take to the Embassy. So you just have to compile those things. It was just logical that we had to celebrate the traditional marriage because we had to make it authentic. The U.S. Embassy is a serious place. They don't take anything lightly. Your papers should convince them.*

To further convince the embassy, the entire family got together in Josephine's village of origin to celebrate the traditional wedding. To show that it is 'a real authentic something.'

Josephine explained to me how her family members put camwood onto her legs and shared palm wine amongst each other. The ancestors needed to bless and recognise the union. From the perspective of the family, the traditional wedding was much more problematic than the legal wedding was. The wife of one of Josephine's uncles, who had indeed been able to travel to the U.S. with the help of the D.V. lottery, was one of Josephine's few family members who opposed the traditional wedding. 'She was like doing this traditional thing and putting that camwood on the leg is too much. [...] She was the only one that was scared.' This aunt of Josephine

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<sup>36</sup> Original Pidgin: 'And now if I for want start argue, them for say I wicked. So I no be want just argue.'

opposed the coupling of the two cousins because she had in Josephine's words 'pity' for her and wanted her to be able to go. Yet, the aunt also opposed the traditional wedding in particular. 'Some things practiced during the traditional wedding are very symbolic,' explained Josephine to me. 'You are abusing the ancestors. It is dangerous. The ancestors will be angry.' When discussing Josephine's fate, Delphine pointed out that disrespect of laws might get you into prison, yet disrespect of 'tradition' and 'ancestral things' can cause you to die.

Possibly, to spread the costs of the application amongst more people, Josephine's cousin also decided that Josephine was to adopt a child for the purpose of the diversity visa application. At the end of its procedure, the U.S. Embassy rang Josephine and asked for the child's birth certificate, the death certificate of the biological mother, as well as photos of the mother's funeral. First, the embassy wanted the documents within a week. Immediately after the first phone call, the embassy called back and asked for all documents and photos the following day. Josephine was being tested as to whether she had all the requested items readily available or not. When the consulate rang the third time, they had gone all the way up to her village of origin where the marriage with her cousin had been registered. They asked Josephine where the adopted child was at that very moment. In the end, Josephine's visa for the U.S., as well as the one for her husband and adopted child was denied. Her fourth attempt at bushfalling had faltered.

Although Josephine knew that it was her 'forced' marriage and the adopted child that caused the denial of her visa, she took the visa denial with a great deal of calm. For her, this failure to go out was no different from her prior failures to fall bush. Moreover, the ten-year ban did not change things much, as all her prior applications had also been turned down.

By the time I was leaving Cameroon, Josephine was busy with hospital visits. She was planning to have a child with one of her boyfriends (who was of course already married). She was aspiring to marry a rich and older man as a second wife. As such, she argued, she would have more independence and could still go on studying for her Master degree in sociology. Not being able to fall bush, marriage, childbirth and education constituted her alternatives. Josephine had sought out security in migration and was now seeking it out through other channels.

The decision of Josephine's cousin had endangered her D.V. visa. She was obliged to act in what, at the time, appeared to be in the interest of the family. Josephine's scope for action at this point was severely limited through both legal (im)possibilities of mobility, as well as the demands from family members. These family pressures are not fully recognised by embassy officials. As the border spectacle of migration through incessant talk of 'fraud' constantly locates the security problem with the migrant, less attention is paid to wider frameworks that push and encourage certain attitudes and choices on the part of visa applicants and their families. Let us pause to consider the financial aspect of Josephine's last failed attempt to use her D.V. lottery win to travel to the U.S.

The U.S. consulate estimated that the application process cost between 200,000 and 300,000 CFA. Yet, Josephine reported that each time she spent between 300,000 and 700,000 CFA. Given these high costs, it is difficult for an individual alone to

raise the necessary money for a lottery visa. The entire family had to come together to support the lucky winner. If the family cannot provide the finances for the lottery winner, the lucky winner can marry and then in-laws will be responsible to finance the D.V. application process (see also Piot 2010: 79). In this context, paper marriages with other family members are difficult to refuse. An individual is rarely able or even willing to pay for the entire application process. Josephine's cousin was financially responsible for all papers and costs for the application process. The cousin got part of this money from his family, and some he had to borrow.

D.V. lottery winners quickly become part of an economy of family and fundraising obligations (Piot 2006). This economy ranges from family arrangements for fundraising efforts, to marriages with the purpose of funding applications, to more commercial types of deals. Consulate staff told a story of a secondary school teacher that had signed up all of his students. He would be the first to know when one of his students had won. He had arranged for all correspondence to pass through his postal address. He thus did his best to financially benefit from the fact that his student had won the lottery by making announcements on the radio that she now needed a spouse.

However, it is important to emphasize that the economy that surrounds D.V. lottery winners (and all visa holders in general) is not merely driven by commercial interests. Given the weight of financial investments for bush, financial efforts for access to bush are spread out over many heads and shoulders. Whatever the amount of money contributed to the bushfelling project of an outgoing bushfeller, such initial financial investments establish linkages with migrants who can thus never be reduced to being mere individuals.

When Delphine was following up her own documents for her visa after having won the scholarship, Delphine did not use the money that she had earned with me during her time as research assistant for her visa. She explained:

*I'm not going for my own good. [...] I'm going for the good of all the family.' Any person who gives no matter how small an amount to a member of family who is about to leave the family will be tied and connected to that bushfeller soon to be.*

Aspiring migrants and aspiring spouses at times feel obliged, even forced, to follow and fulfill the requirements of their family members. The wider social expectations are, as we have seen, in Josephine's case extremely real. However, state authorities in their regulation of migration often consider migrants merely as individuals and fail to recognise these pressures.<sup>37</sup>

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37 When it comes to issues of sexuality and marriage, the regulatory interest of state and family authorities can converge. In my archival research, I found it interesting to note how family members, at times, looked towards state authorities to implement what could not be solved or enforced at the family level. Archival sources document how husbands or fathers wrote to colonial administrators of the British mandate to request passports to reclaim their wives. Other times, husbands demanded passports not to be delivered to their wife so that they would not 'prostitute' themselves. In the early 1950s, for example, Banyangi women in the Mamfe area (North West Cameroon) traveled manifold to Fernando Po (today's Malabo island just across the sea from the South West Province). Concerns about the position of these mostly unmarried women in Fernando Po arouse and the fathers and brothers of these migrant women referred themselves to colonial authorities for their respective travel document so that they could go to Fernando Po and bring back their female members of family.

During fieldwork, I repeatedly heard stories of people cursing a person who had gone out and then decided to come back at the expiry date of the visa. A person, who in this foolish way has given up on the chance of a lifetime, risks being accused of laziness or stupidity. I have witnessed a consulate officer mock a migrant, who had told her that he had been obliged to overstay his visa and work 'illegally'. The ridicule in her voice is supposed to render impossible the consideration that indeed this migrant did consider himself 'forced'. The consulate officer's joking narration of this anecdote serves to present as ridiculous alternative authorities to her own.

Yet, families are themselves multiple forms of regulatory authority. Families of origin and families of procreation can compete with each other over decisions and resources. In addition, even within just the family of origin or procreation, a family network can be divided by strife. Hence, the family is far from being a unitary actor. This chapter is not about family dynamics per se. It is about how regulatory ambitions of state and family actors intersect. Having established the importance of the authority of the family in relation to dealings with the state, the following section will trace in detail the governance of marriage migration from the perspective of a Cameroonian woman called Nuretta.

### **Cameroonian women and security**

While many women dream of falling bush through finding a husband abroad, most never are in a position follow through. As the case of Josephine illustrates, narratives of engagements that are broken or of visas never granted are very common indeed. In my research, I came across a case in which a bushfaller abroad was using his position in bush as a feyman by tricking Cameroonian women into fake marriages. After having spent money on papers for her departure for the U.K., my informant never heard from her supposed fiancé. In this light, Nuretta's ultimate success in departing was surprising and unexpected by everyone. After three long years of being engaged with her Cameroonian fiancé without a single visit of his from the U.S., Nuretta surprised even her closest friends. She had obtained a visa for the U.S. and only two weeks later left on a plane to rejoin a man whom she had never before seen in her life.

I learned about Nuretta's case of marriage migration through Delphine, a very close friend and age-mate to Nuretta. We had discussed the case of Nuretta and had planned to establish contact to explore whether Nuretta could become one of our informants. Yet, her departure took us by surprise. Although I had by the time of writing established contact with Nuretta through Internet and phone, the research data below predominantly reflect Delphine's perspective onto Nuretta's

case.<sup>38</sup> I also include material from later phone calls with Nuretta in the U.S., as well as discussions and disagreements that Delphine and I had with respect to Nuretta's case.

Nuretta left Cameroon half way through my fieldwork period and yet she left me with important puzzles. Just like in a popular pop-song called 'njumboss@yahoo.fr', Nuretta's husband abroad had found and chosen her based on a photo. It was difficult to understand why her fiancé was serious about the marriage, even though he had never come to Cameroon for a visit. In what follows, I will discuss how in Nuretta's case security articulates itself with sexuality, legality and the social status of families. Marriage certificates, visas and bridewealth payments are all regulatory instruments that license the mobility of women. I will first discuss Nuretta's case from the perspective of courtship and marriage choices. I will then conclude with an analysis of her case from the perspective of family dynamics.

### ***Nuretta: securing sex and marriage***

Just like the heroine of the song, Nuretta got her bushfaller husband through a photo. When a close friend of Nuretta's mother had won the D. V. visa lottery, she helped him with the costs of the visa application process and the flight to the U.S. When in the U.S., the friend and social uncle of Nuretta failed to meet the expectations of Nuretta's mother for remittances. However, he did become engaged to the sister of Nuretta's mother, and when this engagement broke off, asked for photos of Nuretta and her siblings. Wanting to buy Christmas gifts and clothes for them, he needed to know their sizes. He showed around the photos of his niece at a monthly meeting in Maryland for people from his village. One of the men present at the meeting liked the photo of Nuretta and the two began communicating. Eventually they were engaged. Thus, the mediating role of family members for Nuretta's engagement and eventual marriage was crucial.

At first, Nuretta hesitated on whether or not to accept the engagement proposal. The encouragements from her mother, sister and friends like Delphine played a role in Nuretta's acceptance. Still, she did not only accept the offer because Thomas was a bushfaller. He was a serious alternative to local men in other ways. Before communicating with Thomas over the phone, Nuretta had been dating a student at the university. While she liked the student, Nuretta's great fear was that the student boyfriend might not be serious about their relationship. As a test for his seriousness, she suggested to not have sex before marriage (or at least before her graduation).

When Delphine and her elder sister persuaded Nuretta to accept the engagement proposal of the bushfaller, sexual dynamics changed. Because Nuretta's new fiancé was in the U.S., she was no longer under daily pressure to have sex. Her engagement with somebody abroad reduced the risk of losing her virginity before

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<sup>38</sup> Delphine was one of Nuretta's closest friends. To analyse Nuretta's case allowed me to study a case of marriage migration through research material that was generated by somebody who herself was deeply involved with the theme of outmigration and marriage.

marriage. Whenever somebody from their village of origin would travel back to Cameroon, her fiancé would be sending her deodorants, perfume, hand cream, T-shirts and shoes. These gifts and, at times, money were consistent signs of his commitment and seriousness. Thus after their engagement, Nuretta's mother could already slightly reduce the money she needed to put aside for her daughter.<sup>39</sup>

Nuretta's fiancé did not come for a visit for four years. In my personal view, being engaged for so long to someone she had not met in person was risky. Yet, Delphine and Nuretta did not view a fiancé's visit before marriage as crucial. As neighbours, former classmates and close friends, they were very intimate and shared their doubts and hopes. If Thomas had come to Cameroon, reasoned Delphine, the couple would have needed to spend some time together – maybe in a hotel room. It would have been very difficult for Nuretta to refuse sex in those circumstances. Her long distance engagement, however, allowed her to be free of the anxiety of losing her virginity. The kinds of guarantees, protections and safeguards Nuretta was seeking were different from the ones I had assumed she would need or desire. She looked at the engagement more from within a perspective of marriage than of migration.

For Delphine, too, the real threat did not rest with an unknown fiancé. While sex with mbomas (who are by definition already married) occurs clearly for the sake of money, the role and meaning of sex with bushfallers is more ambiguous. A bushfaller, could during a visit in Cameroon, make promises of marriage only to disappear after his departure. Delphine called these bushfallers *thieflass run* – that is, they steal sex and disappear. In this context, the geographical distance secured Nuretta's marriage and her virginity to a potential *thieflass run*. Many such cases exist, in which Cameroonian women cry or are pregnant from bushfallers that disappear from their lives after departure.<sup>40</sup> The real risk, from Delphine's perspective, were *thieflass run* bushfallers.

Given the ongoing crisis in Cameroon, bush raises issues of financial security – which are also connected to the seriousness of potential partners in marriage. From this perspective, the security threat is posed by a situation where more and more men in Cameroon are no longer in a position to live up to the expectations and responsibilities of marriage (Goheen 1996). More and more men cannot afford the costs of bridewealth. As more men are obliged to stay single, women have to turn to other places and means to seek and fulfill expectations of marriage as an

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39 When Nuretta completed her B.A. degree in biochemistry, her fiancé refused to send money for her inscription at M.A. level. It was only with her mother's money that she was able to apply for admission. Yet, Nuretta was not admitted and thus stayed at home after her graduation. In the end, Nuretta and Delphine were happy that Nuretta had not continued her education after her Bachelor's degree. If Nuretta had started an M.A. programme in Cameroon, she would have needed to complete the programme before she could have rejoined her husband in the U.S.

40 A visit from Thomas would not have been a strong guarantee that he would actually marry her and 'take her over'. As Delphine stressed, marriage would have even become less certain if Thomas had already gotten what he wanted during a visit, i.e. sex. Retrospectively, Delphine shared with me how she and Nuretta congratulated themselves on the way things had gone. It was precisely Thomas's physical distance in bush that had protected her virginity and that had made her marriage plans so very safe. Over the phone, Nuretta told Delphine how happy her husband had been when he found out upon Nuretta's arrival in the U.S. that his spouse was a virgin. Now her husband treats her as a queen and has even bought her a car as a gift.



avenue for a better and safer life. Through his presence in bush, Nuretta's husband was able to secure for himself and his wife the kind of life that many other men in Cameroon currently could not.

While the French consulate views loyalties of aspiring Cameroonian spouses to their families of origin as a threat, family connections were the safety that allowed for Nuretta's marriage migration. The case of Nuretta also shows us that access to a livelihood and security can be more important than access to migration. Nuretta sought marriage above and before migration. She did not mind migrating, but did not plan it with the same sense of determination as Josephine.

When thus discussing marriage migration, it is important to consider the locally available alternatives. Whether migration becomes possible or not, women's options are vastly determined through marriage. As much as they aspire to migrate, families even so expect marriage. After her graduation, Delphine told me that now it was 'either marriage or bush'. When she was browsing the profiles of men on [www.tagged.com](http://www.tagged.com), she was not doing this as a mere instrumental route to get to bush. She was doing so because marriage at this point was becoming ever more inescapable and having a bushfaller massa would at least allow her to travel.

Mobility remains an important factor within marriage consideration even after arrival in bush. After Delphine had been in bush for six months, a Nigerian man in Switzerland proposed marriage to Delphine. He wanted her to look after his business in Nigeria. For Delphine, this was out of the question. Her cousin in Switzerland shared Delphine's rejection of the proposal and joked that she would rather like to find a husband for Delphine to go to the U.S. Whether in bush or in Cameroon, husbands have to be chosen according to where they can bring you to – both in terms of social and geographical mobility.

Delphine is clear and out-spoken about the terms and conditions on which she will agree to marry. When she will marry, her husband will have to agree to bring over one of her younger sisters and brothers. Since she was already in bush and hence saved him the effort of bringing her there, it then was his responsibility to bring over another family member. Delphine's vision of the terms and conditions under which she would agree to marriage stemmed from a deeply ingrained understanding that a man has to pay a bridewealth for his future spouse.

As times change, currencies change, too. Today's currency is bush. Access and connections to bush are of such value that bush can be considered a monetary system to make payments. In the case of marriage, access to bush can be a means of payment that replaces bridewealth payments (Johnson-Hanks 2007). In this sense, bush has also come to replace the value of means of bridewealth payments available to men who are in Cameroon. A husband in bush has to be able to bring over his spouse. It would be difficult for a Cameroonian woman already abroad to marry a man who is still in Cameroon. Thus in these cases, aspiring Cameroonian husbands might have to accept to 'bring over' family members of their spouses.

Delphine's expectations of her future husband also explain why marriage is less important in men's strategies for emigration. It is not within the Cameroonian matrix of marriage for a woman to bring over a man. That's is the man's domain. In a rap song, a young woman rebuffs her boyfriend with the following line: 'It's

your love that I am supposed to eat?’<sup>41</sup> The hero of the song consequently decides to go to bush. He is falling bush to bring back food to his girlfriend in Cameroon: ‘Le Camer a les dents.’ ‘Cameroon has teeth,’ meaning it’s a tough terrain to survive. Being in bush or going to bush can enhance a man’s scope for marriage. Yet, for him, marriage cannot be – or rarely is – the tool that enables migration.

While the njumboss song tells the story of marriage to a white man, more often than not, these bushfaller marriages occur between Cameroonian men from bush (the West) with women from their own respective bush (village of origin). Many times, both families of origin of the spouses of bushfaller marriages are from the same village of origin. Bush takes on a double meaning here: first, as the authority of the global and secondly as the authority of the family back in the village of origin. Both dimensions of bush are connected.<sup>42</sup> Families of origin assert their expectations and norms over the individual emissaries in bush and make sure they stay connected (however global their aspirations) also to their bush back in Cameroon. In discussions of Internet-mediated marriages, it is important to stress continuities between marriage migration and marriage, mobility and money in Cameroon itself.

#### ***Nuretta: securing bridewealth and status***

Both of Nuretta’s parents were very happy that their daughter was going to get married to a bushfaller in the U.S. Although they had never met Thomas in person, they did not (just like Nuretta) have any worries or concerns about Thomas’s character. Nuretta’s uncle was connected with Thomas through the monthly meetings of all people from Nuretta’s village in Maryland. Uncle Richard would not have allowed for the engagement if Thomas had been known to be troublesome character. Family and village networks provided for additional security for Nuretta’s marriage and migration trajectory. When Nuretta, nevertheless, was a little nervous about her marriage with a man she had never met, Delphine reassured her friend and argued that ‘a man who can be patient with [her] for four years and could send money for the process of [her] documents’ should most probably be a nice man. He did not have to spend his money to bring over Nuretta. He could have also gotten married to other Cameroonian girls who already were in the U.S. In addition, he at one point refused a girl in the U.S. who was from his same village. As both families lived in the same quarter together with Delphine, gossip was running high. These were all guarantees for the safe future of Nuretta and her marriage in the U.S.

At first, I was surprised that the bridewealth was only paid after Nuretta’s arrival in the U.S.<sup>43</sup> Traditional weddings do not require the physical presence of the spouses and are important celebrations for a marital union to be fully valid. Potential husbands are expected to enable social (and at times geographical) mobility

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<sup>41</sup> Original: ‘C’est ton amour que je vais manger?’ Musician: Koppo. Song title: ‘Je go’. Refrain : ‘Si tu vois ma go, dis lui que je go.’ (Translation: ‘If you see my girlfriend, tell her that I’ve left.’)

<sup>42</sup> For further details on this connection, see my discussion of the case study of Manuella in the forthcoming chapter.

<sup>43</sup> For further details on marriage practices and kinship structures amongst the Bangwa, see Brain’s work (1972: 118- 154).

and at times, mobility can be more important than marriage itself. The bridewealth issue was hence also considered in relation to the mobility issue. Nuretta's mum contended the following in conversation with Delphine: '[If] the man would have [...] given the bridewealth, [...he could still have kept] her here for the next ten years. [...] The most important now is that she is there and she can support us.' The risk here lies in one's daughter being condemned to staying in Cameroon and the family not receiving help and support from bush.

Nuretta's father refused to receive the bridewealth payment before Nuretta had travelled because he prioritised migration over marriage. Even though the visa had been granted, the travel project needed to remain secret (see introduction of the thesis) and, furthermore, Nuretta explained that her father preferred the two spouses to know each other before they were to marry traditionally.<sup>44</sup>

Threats to the social and financial security to families back in Cameroon can also arise through conflicting loyalties between families of procreation and origin. Long after Nuretta had already arrived in the U.S. and had given birth, Delphine (now in Sweden) called Nuretta's mother. In their discussion, Nuretta's mother was praising her daughter and how much she had done for her. 'Your friend has really helped us. Who says that girls are no good? I'm really very happy. My child is really making an effort.'<sup>45</sup> When Delphine called Nuretta directly afterwards to share how very happy and proud her mother was, Delphine had to keep the phone call short. Nuretta's husband was at home. Delphine did not know how Nuretta had managed to raise the money that she was sending home to her mother. Perhaps Nuretta was managing to send home more money than her husband did. Thus, the phone call had to end there.

Such conflicts between family of origin and procreation also explain why Nuretta and Delphine were glad that Thomas had not come to Cameroon for a visit before their actual marriage. Such a visit would have meant an incredible financial investment for Thomas. The entire extended family of Thomas would have expected gifts, presents, support, a party and potentially investments into housing or business projects for specific family members.

Given that Nuretta was engaged, it was the responsibility of Thomas and his family to ensure that she would be able to travel. They had thought about processing a marriage certificate through connections, but, in the end, did not have to because she had won the D.V. When she won the D.V., her husband first wondered whether she could legally marry a brother of his. Nuretta tells me over the phone: 'I would have loved to do it... to help my brother in law... but my husband decided for me to come alone.'

Interestingly, Nuretta was not involved in the D.V. lottery herself. Her husband played the lottery for her and then also managed the application process afterwards:

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44 After the visa had been issued, both families celebrated a formal introduction. After her arrival in the U.S., Nuretta became pregnant within the space of two months. As bridewealth payments should not be made while a woman is pregnant, the celebration of the bridewealth payment was further delayed.

45 Original: 'Your friend don help we plenty. Who say girl pikin no fine? I dey really glad. The pikin de really try.'

*He was the one that was telling what and what document to make. Even the driving licence, he was the one that told us to do it. Have I ever been to the U.S. or do I know how these things function? I don't know.*

It is the man's and thus by extension the man's family's responsibility to bring the woman over and Nuretta was following his instructions. Marriage is the affair of not two individuals, but two families. The family of Nuretta's father were in charge of her journey to the U.S., not she.

Many families in Cameroon prefer bushfallers to the immediate bridewealth payment. This also comes also out of conversations that Delphine had with her friend's mother after Nuretta's departure. Mamie Nuretta explained to Delphine the following:

*The important thing is for my daughter to be there and not for the man to come. The man could still have come, get married to my daughter, but there is no guarantee that she will eventually follow him to the U.S. So I think it's God's work. I think it's God's work. I thank God for that.*

Nuretta's mother is thanking God that her daughter had been able to follow her husband to the U.S. The irony is that one of the main family expectations is that bushfallers 'carry over' their other members of family or spouses. Legally speaking, this might also be framed as 'smuggling.' Yet, for family members it constitutes an enormous source of help and support and in most cases the only avenue for being able to leave the country at all. Bushfallers even have the social responsibility to try to bring over another member of family. This contradiction between the notion of 'smuggling' and the notion of 'carrying' or 'bringing' somebody over points me back to the importance of considering both the authority of family and state.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has worked out how struggles over the legitimacy of various regulatory authorities result in accusations of fraud and fears of selfishness at the Embassy. Within the phenomenon of marriage migration, multiple regulatory ambitions become visible. State officials and families both have their own perspective on what norms they try to secure. From the cases delineated in this chapter, we can see how the spheres of state and family – in their efforts to regulate the mobility and sexuality of women – often intersect and at times even reinforce each other.

This chapter has opened with quotations from e-mails from French men who accuse Cameroonian women of fraud and of selfishness. Consulate officers at the French Embassy identified with the core message of these e-mails and considered them as justifications for their work. Regulatory dynamics at both the French and the American consulate office are driven by fears and accusations that visa appli-

cants and their family members might be committing fraud for their own egoistic purposes. Through these accusations, state authorities locate the security threat with visa applicants and aspiring spouses.

Following De Genova's argument on the legal production of illegality, this chapter has explored the bureaucratic production of fraud and selfishness. In other words, rather than taking at face value the location of the security problem with the visa applicants, I have analysed the very process that constructs these visa applicants as fraudulent and selfish. What has emerged from this analysis is that regulatory dynamics at consulate offices reveal normative assumptions on legitimate monetary exchanges, marital unions and family loyalties. It is by seeking to impose these that consulate officers construct visa applicants in general and aspiring female spouses in particular as supposedly 'fraudulent' and 'selfish'.

At the most basic level, the case study of Josephine has demonstrated how very important family networks are for the regulation of migration. Families constitute an authority that obliges migrants to act in specific ways. While consulate officers might seek to ridicule the regulatory authority of the family, these obligations are serious and important for (aspiring) migrants. In fact, insecurities are created through the very fact that state and family fail to take seriously their respective authority. Family authorities mark visa applicants and aspiring spouses as selfish when they do not comply with expectations, even if this brings the aspiring migrants in conflict with regulatory dynamics within the realm of the state. State officials do not respect, understand or want to understand the regulatory dynamics that underlie certain actions and vice versa. Regulatory expectations from within the realm of the state and the family thus create difficult and, at times, impossible situations for aspiring migrants and spouses in particular.

This chapter also demonstrated where and how - from the perspective of an individual Cameroonian woman - security issues are located. Contrary to expectations at consulate offices, what has emerged from this analysis is that Nuretta actually sought out marriage above and before migration. Attitudes towards Internet-mediated marriage migration thus need to be placed in the context of expectations of marriage and possibilities for security in Cameroon itself. To understand the bureaucratic production of selfishness and fraud, the role and place of money in courtship and marriage practices and of paper in trajectories of marriage migration need to be considered also from the perspective of young Cameroonian women.

I want to close the chapter by returning to the different visualisations of the security, marriage and migration nexus that we have encountered throughout the chapter. At the U.S. consulate, a whole table of marriage and courtship photos visually reminds consulate officers to remain vigilant in the face of 'fakeness'. These photos, amongst others, proved Josephine's case at the U.S. consulate to be 'fake'. Both she and her cousin were refused a visa. Yet, in her own narrative, she was driven by the fear of 'fake' visas, 'fake' brokers or husbands and fiancés that were not serious. While migrant women at Embassies are seen through the almost exclusive prism of paper, representations of marriage migration and security differ within the realm of the family. The photo that Nuretta sent to Delphine is one of

her proudly carrying her newborn baby girl and happily smiling in front of an Obama poster in a clean and comfortably modern apartment.

At the French consulate, e-mail posters located the threats to citizenship boundaries with the selfishness and fake intentions of Cameroonian women. Josephine, Nuretta and Mamie Comfort (who wrote to me asking me for a serious husband to marry) all have their own set of security concerns and fears of 'fakeness'. The point is not only that locations of security threats are multiple, but that security threats also cross over each other. What is marked in French e-mail posters as acts of selfishness constitutes the primary duty of a daughter towards her family of origin in Cameroon. Accusations of selfishness on the part of *both* family members and state officials thus serve to reign in and control bonds of loyalties and membership of mobile spouses.

The conclusions of this study have taught us that accusations of selfishness on the part of both families and state actors constitute control mechanisms and regulatory ambitions - regardless of the normative framework. Having explored the regulatory authority of the state in the preceding chapter, I had to shift to include the regulatory authority of the family in this chapter to be able to make visible the regulatory dynamics that produce fraud and selfishness. In the next chapter, I will further shift towards the perspective of family networks. The effects of state regulation, I will argue, only become visible through this shift of perspective.

## Unlucky, but worldly: The moral economy of deportation in Cameroon



11. Bar in Bamenda: 'Wisdom Embassy Annex'

Bushfallers are highly valued because they can change the fate and future of an entire family. This raises the question of how the danger of deportation affects the special status of bushfallers. It became clear to me how valued bushfallers are when Delphine and her friends discussed an incident they had heard about on the radio. In the course of a minor dispute over the car's paperwork, a bushfaller on visit to Cameroon got shot dead by the police. 'A whole bushfaller! They shot a whole bushfaller! Not even a normal man like me, but a whole bushfaller!'<sup>1</sup> The surprise and shock of Delphine and her friends was not about the abuse of police power, but towards the consequences of the death of a bushfaller for his the family. A bushfaller life is worth more worth than of 'normal' people. Expectations and hopes of the whole family are projected onto the family member who is in bush. Bushfallers are the 'sunshine in their family' and family responsibilities are on their shoulders. Then, what happens if the bushfaller of the family is deported back to Cameroon?

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<sup>1</sup> The term *whole bushfaller* is part of the Pidgin terminology and expresses the sense of worth and value of the bushfaller in question. In Standard English, one might want to translate this expression as this person being a *real* bushfaller.

Deportation can be defined as the ‘compulsory removal of ‘aliens’ [or non aliens] from the physical, juridical and social space of the state’ (De Genova & Peutz 2010: 1). At the most basic level, deportation is an instrument of the state’s attempt to regulate migration.<sup>2</sup> Besides the physical removal of undocumented aliens, deportation policy is guided by the motivation of politicians and government officials to want to stop further ‘irregular’ migration. Politicians legitimise deportation policies through notions such as national sovereignty and citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Deportation policy is supposed to discourage potential future migrants from endeavouring to reach the territory of European or other nation states.

Within anti-trafficking policies, return programmes are considered a ‘remedy’ to the exploitation and human rights abuses of the person considered to have been ‘trafficked’.<sup>4</sup> The underlying assumption is that women are safe at home and in danger away (Agustin 2002; Alpes 2010). This chapter questions this view, as well as the assumption that deportation could have a deterrent effect on migratory decisions. It does so through a close analysis of how deportation becomes visible in Anglophone Cameroon, as well as through a study of the trajectory of one woman who migrated and was later deported. The main case study of Manuella will be contrasted with the experiences of a few other women and men who have also experienced deportation.

Within political science literature, the issue of deportation is seen predominantly as a public policy issue. Consequently, deportation is often analysed in terms of state sovereignty and the state’s capacity for migration control (Guiraudon & Lahar 2000; Leerkers & Broeders 2010), but also in terms of the limits to the exercise of force within liberal democracies (Ellermann 2009; Freeman 1994; Gibney & Hansen 2003) and in terms of citizenship (Walters 2002; Nyers 2003). In contrast to the perspective of the state and its implications for public policy, this chapter explores the event of deportation from the perspective of individuals and their family networks in Cameroon.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I seek to explain the paradox of deportation and people’s unsailable trust in bush through an exploration of the moral economy of deportation in Cameroon. In line with my overall research question on the sources of vulnerability for migrant women, I examine how the social status of deported migrant

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2 A look through history reveals that deportation law only emerged in the late nineteen and twentieth centuries (Torpey 1998).

3 De Genova argues that deportation is a ‘complex socio-political regime’ that both ‘manifests and engenders dominant notions of sovereignty and citizenship (De Genova and Peutz 2010: 2).’ As such, deportation does not simply flow out of dominant notions of citizenship and (state) sovereignty, but contributes towards constructing and rendering them dominant or seemingly natural.

4 For the sake of the criminal persecution of so called traffickers, many destination countries now provide temporary legal stays to ‘victims’ who agree to cooperate with police authorities. Such programmes are, however, limited in time. Migrants, who do not want to cooperate with the police, go back to the status of undocumented and deportable migrants. After the court case, it can be possible for ‘trafficking victims’ to gain legal papers on humanitarian grounds. However, this is not guaranteed. The default position even for ‘trafficking victims’ always remains the one of deportable alien.

5 Another stream of research looks at social movements and political struggles that form themselves around the issue of deportation on the sub-Saharan African continent. For still-ongoing research in this field, see Clara Lecadet and Stephan Dünwald.



women relates to issues of marriage and sexuality. What impact does a forced return have on the lives of migrant women and their family members? What impact does the issue of deportation have on migratory decisions of aspiring migrants in Cameroon?

### **Moral economy of deportation**

By answering the above question, I seek to work towards a detailed analysis of the moral economy of deportation in Cameroon. With moral economy of deportation, I refer to the production and circulation of values, emotions and norms that are evoked by the event of deportation (Fassin 2009: 1257). While deportation is an instrument of state authorities, I will not consider deportation from the perspective of state authorities. Instead I explore the moral yardsticks in Cameroon that family members and society apply to measure the success and failure of migrants, as well as the ways in which deportation does and does not become visible in Cameroon. I shall use insights from the moral economy of deportation in Cameroon to unravel the legal consciousness that feeds into the widespread belief by policy makers in countries of arrival that deportation could serve to discourage further emigration.

Within the moral economy of deportation in Cameroon, deportations are referred to through the expression of 'being sent back'. Distinctions between different types of forced returns are not relevant. In a survey of different neighbourhoods in Buea, 75 percent of all respondents had a family member who is in bush, 42 percent had a family member who had come back to Cameroon to either visit or stay, and 9 percent declared to have a member of family who had been repatriated to Cameroon.<sup>6</sup> In my compound of only 18 small studios, two or three people had been 'sent back' after longer stays in bush. Different police officers at both Douala and Yaoundé airports estimated that between twenty to sixty people a month were sent back because border officials at the destination airport refused entry.<sup>7</sup> Actual deportation numbers (of people who had already entered the national territory of arriving states) are lower, but were still estimated by both police contacts of mine to be roughly fifteen per month.<sup>8</sup>

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6 As I have discussed in the introduction, this survey covered 100 informants in different neighbourhoods. Given the shamefulness of deportation and its connected regimes of secrecy, the figure of nine percent of family members that had been sent back is indicative of a rather high rate of involuntary returns. If I furthermore relate the figure of 9 deportations within my survey of 100 respondents to the figure of 42 respondents who indicated that they have a member of family in bush coming to either visit or stay, one could estimate that one out of five returning bushfallers may not have returned voluntarily.

7 From the context of my conversation with the respective officer, it was clear that he was referring here to travellers who were intercepted at airports abroad and never allowed into the national territory of other states.

8 According to a 2009 report of *Centre d'information, de reflexion et d'echanges en matiere de franchissement des frontieres et d'immigration*, 579 Cameroonians were deported from the European Union in 2006 and 467 in 2007 (quoted by Evina 2009: 56). In 2009, the Netherlands coordinated two joint deportation flights for the European border agency Frontex

While deportation is a common phenomenon, it is guarded as a public secret in Cameroon (for open secrets, see Kosofsky 1991: 22). Even though most of my neighbours suspected or *de facto* knew about cases of deportation in our compound, the unwritten rule of respect prevented people from openly speaking about it. The shame associated with a forced return is too deep. As a consequence of this moral economy of deportation, neither high deportation rates in general, nor the concrete experience of deportation (directly or through a family member) does anything to alter people's ambitions for mobility. Despite high deportation rates, bush at all cost remains a highly desired project in Cameroon.

The moral economy of deportation in Cameroon challenges the idea of deportation as the ultimate failure. After four years of hustling in Switzerland, the key informant of this chapter, Manuella, had been deported.<sup>9</sup> However, I was surprised to find how much people continued to admire her for her worldly status. This is the way a male friend of mine talked about Manuella after night out together in Douala: 'She is a woman of the world – a very refined somebody. The kind of person a man would like to go out with.' The male friend did not know that Manuella had been deported. The manner in which Manuella dressed, talked and behaved made it clear that she had been to bush. Unlike most other Cameroonians, a deported person has been abroad and seen the world.

As a deported migrant woman, Manuella was seen as 'worldly', yet also 'un-lucky'. It depends on circumstances, however, whether a deported bushfaller may be able to draw social capital from his or her prior exposure to bush, or may be judged for his or her failure to fully live up to the expectations of bushfalling. A relation of Manuella interpreted Manuella's forced return in these terms: 'She didn't get lucky. That's the thing that brought her back.' The individual failure to remain in bush is linked to the bad luck of an individual and does not usually put into question the faith invested into bushfalling. The success of others is too tangible and visible to let the evidence of an individual case question the profitability of bushfalling.

Manuella was born in 1981 in a small village called Babisi<sup>10</sup> in the North West Province of Cameroon. The first time she migrated was during her teenage years when she was escaping a forced marriage in her village of origin. I was introduced to Manuella through her sister in law in Buea. Beltha had become my informant

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to West Africa. The carriers deported 103 migrants from the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Belgium, France, Spain and Austria to both Nigeria and Cameroon. Deportation rates are much higher for Nigeria than for Cameroon. Within the Frontex report, these deportations are referred to as 'joint returns'. In 2008, two 'joint return' operations were carried out for Cameroonians. Germany coordinated a deportation flight for 26 Cameroonians and Togolese and the Netherlands coordinated a deportation flight of 16 Cameroonians. In 2010, the Netherlands coordinated another return operation for migrants from Nigeria and Cameroon. Data stems from the annual General Reports and the website of Frontex ([http://www.frontex.europa.eu/annual\\_report](http://www.frontex.europa.eu/annual_report)).

<sup>9</sup> 'Hustling' is a term used in Cameroon that refers to 'working money in bush', as well as fighting to make it and have success in bush. The term is also used more generally (i.e. not in relation to bush) when people talk about fighting to make a living and accepting any kind of work or means to try and have success. For the meaning of the term in Nigeria, also see (Chernoff 2003).

<sup>10</sup> So as to guarantee a maximum degree of anonymity for Manuella, the name of her natal village has been changed to another village name in her area of origin.

because she (just like Manuella a few years earlier) was also preparing to leave the country with a migration broker. After our first meeting in Switzerland, I was surprised to find Manuella at my doorstep only months later. How did Manuella experience her deportation and how did she cope with her new geographical location and social setting? How did her close and distant families deal and react to her deportation? I shall examine perceptions, evaluations and consequences of deportation in Cameroon by tracing four geographical locations in Manuella's life story: Buea, Douala, Babisi and Abuja.

### **Buea: bad luck and secrecy**

*'When you are deported, it's like a challenge. You want to go back to challenge what people think of you.'*

#### ***A surprise guest at a njangi meeting: the public secret of deportation<sup>11</sup>***

On the 10th of April 2008, I walked up the main road of Buea and accidentally bumped into Jonathan, Manuella's brother. At Jonathan's house, Manuella's sister-in-law showed me photos of Manuella in Switzerland. On that fateful day, Jonathan told me that Alisha was back. I did not immediately understand the significance of what he was saying. He used the name that Manuella had been using in bush.

I found it hard to believe that he was referring to his bushfaller sister. Manuella is in Douala? Different scenarios ran through my mind. Has she been deported? Has she given up and returned for good? What has she told her family? Will she be able to return to Switzerland? Jonathan was calm and seemingly unperturbed about this piece of news. I wondered about her brother's understanding of the situation. 'Why are you surprised?' he asked me. 'This is her home. It's normal for her to come here.' I asked him what Manuella's plans were, but Jonathan did not know. They had not yet talked about details. 'We are just happy to see her after all those years.'

Jonathan gave me Manuella's new Cameroonian telephone number. Next to 'Manuella Zürich', I stored her new number as 'Manuella Douala'. 'It's like a dream,' she told me as I called her up only minutes later. She was at the hairdresser in Douala. She explained that she had been staying in a hotel in Douala for the first four days. With her many nieces and cousins, it would have been very crowded for her to stay at any of her brothers' places. She did not know yet what she wanted to do, let alone where she was going to stay. I offered my place for a few weeks in case she needed and wanted some more privacy. She was glad for the offer and

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<sup>11</sup> A njangi group is a savings group that meets at regular intervals.

explained that she would be coming to Buea on that same day. She invited me to join her that night for the monthly savings group meeting (called njangi meeting) at her brother's house in Buea.

That same evening, the members of the monthly savings group arrived all dressed in the same pattern of wrapper material in the living room of Jonathan's house. While all members lived in Buea, everyone came from Babisi – Manuella's village of origin in the North West Province. When I had first visited Jonathan's house in October of the preceding year, the many photos of Manuella decorating the walls and the cabinet of the living room struck me. For example, Manuella dressed in white trousers and a blue summer top in front of a beautifully sunny lake in Switzerland; Manuella smiling into the camera inside a room; or Manuella smiling into the camera with friends. Aside from a few other family photos and a traditional gong from Babisi, there were only photos of Manuella.

Even though Manuella had only occasionally sent presents to her family and only on very rare occasions money, she nevertheless had been *the* bushfaller of the family. While families in Cameroon are known to exert a great deal of pressure on migrants in bush, when I spoke with her sister-in-law Beltha last October, she did not seem worried nor dissatisfied. While she knew that Manuella did not have papers, she told me that she trusted things would become easier for Manuella with time. Despite Manuella's still undocumented status in Luzern,<sup>12</sup> Beltha had also signed up for a bushfalling line with one of the migration brokers in Buea. She told me with a wink in her eyes that one bushfaller was not enough: 'Every family wants to have that name.'

Beltha had already stopped her payments when Manuella was still in bush. Yet, it was not Manuella's deportation that had calmed down Beltha's enthusiasm for bush. After many years of having worked on a voluntary basis with hardly any pay at the public hospital in Buea, Beltha had finally been given a better employment contract at the hospital. These days, she is fully employed and has just given birth to her third child. Consequently, Beltha's husband decided to invest his money for her bushfalling project into building a house to rent out to tenants.

I had heard from Beltha, when I was in Cameroon for my pilot study in October 2007, that she had a sister-in-law who lived in Switzerland. I hence paid Manuella a visit when I passed through Switzerland on my way back to Europe that December. While airports reminded Manuella of the long weeks she had spent in prison there, she came to pick me up at the airport. I was loaded with gifts from Manuella's sister-in-law: dried vegetables, dried fish, cracked melon seeds and a bunch of drawings from Beltha's children. While riding the train to her house, Manuella cried as she read letters from her nieces. With occasional interruptions from her Nigerian boyfriend (in whose house she was staying), we chatted the entire day and recorded a long interview about her past four years in Switzerland.

In April 2008 (six months after having first been to the house of Manuella's brother and five months after having met her in Luzern), I was now again in

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<sup>12</sup> So as to enhance the potential for Manuella's anonymity, Luzern is not the real name of the town where Manuella was staying.

Jonathan's living room. Yet, this time I was there together with Manuella. She was one of the last people to arrive that evening. As she entered, she held the baby of one of her elder brothers in her arms. She was dressed in a trendy pair of bright jeans and a light pink blouse that closed around the neck. Her jewellery was fashionable and her haircut unusual. Not plaited or covered by artificial hair (as is commonplace in Cameroon); her natural hair was cut in a fashion similar to haircuts in Europe. As the host of the evening, Jonathan welcomed in a speech the two special guests of the evening: Manuella and me. Jonathan explained that Manuella had just arrived and excused her for not wearing the njangi uniform as everybody else. Without ever having been physically present, Manuella had been participating in this monthly savings group for a while.<sup>13</sup> It was thus a happy and special occasion to be able to physically welcome her in the savings group.

As food was shared, I noticed how intrigued Manuella was to be back at her brother's house after these four years. She looked around the room stumbling across the many photos of her. 'You are looking at your photos?' asked her close friend and sister-in-law Beltha. 'Yeah, my photos are everywhere!' She was struggling to remember people's names. As the evening went on, Manuella received text messages and had missed calls from her Nigerian boyfriend in Zürich. Beltha admired Manuella's flashy mobile phone and her digital photo camera.

During the evening, we looked at Manuella's photos on her mobile phone and digital camera. A photo of Manuella in a beautifully clean and modern car wearing a seat belt immediately revealed that this was a photo from bush. Other photos of Manuella in her apartment in Zürich were similar to the ones in the photo album and on the walls. She told us about her friends and their boyfriends. She explained to us how Cameroonian women in bush like to date Nigerians. 'Nigerian men like to take care of girls. It's in their tradition. You come to Europe. You need help. Why not?' Another group of photos showed Manuella with friends on a night out in Luzern. The photos showed her eating, drinking and dancing. The final photo on her photo camera showed Manuella in a clothes shop. 'This is a shop at Frankfurt airport,' explained Manuella to Beltha and me.

These photos gave the impression of a happy goodbye party and then an ordinary trip back to Cameroon. Yet, when dancing with her friends on that night in Zürich, Manuella had not been aware that only a few days after, she would find herself in Cameroon. Manuella's departure had not been planned. To the contrary, she was with us that night in Buea for the village meeting only because a few days prior she had been deported. None of this was mentioned during the savings group meeting.<sup>14</sup> From the vantage point of Buea, I was struck how invisible the reasons for her return were. Although her return had been forced, what became visible on that evening were her fashionable clothing, hairstyle, camera, phone and photos. They all clearly spoke of the promise of bush.

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<sup>13</sup> The monthly saving rates of this njangi group were between ten and fifteen Euros.

<sup>14</sup> I do not know what Manuella discussed one-to-one with Beltha in my absence. Yet, there was not much time and space for one-to-ones and this was the first time that she was meeting her brothers after her deportation. After the njangi meeting, Manuella slept at Beltha's place. The morning after, she came to my place; and already in the afternoon, she had left back again for Douala.

While in Manuella's case her brothers and close members of family knew about her deportation, they decided together not to tell the other relatives what had happened. As Manuella's status as a bushfaller reflected positively onto her relatives too, they were happy and willing to keep the reasons of Manuella's return a secret. Her presence in bush had notably been an important source of hope and status for her family. As Manuella herself puts it, 'People look at you somehow differently when you have somebody abroad. I think it gives somebody some courage.' It would have been shameful for the more distant relatives to know about the reasons of Manuella's return. To return after many years in bush with 'empty hands' is likely to be considered as a sign of laziness. When explicitly asked about the reason for her return, Manuella explained that she had come back to Cameroon to marry.

Six months after this njangi meeting, Manuella reflected upon her deportation and her family's reactions to it.

*My brothers knew about it and we decided not to tell the other relatives about what happened. But they could figure that out themselves you know. I mean I've been staying... if you come to visit, you cannot come and stay... I mean I have been staying now for six months so it is too much just to visit. So people will start figuring out themselves why she is still here, what happened and that stuff.*

The stigma of Manuella's deportation is not immediately, but always potentially perceivable to her environment (on discreditable stigma, see Goffman 1963: 41- 104). Consequently, Manuella and her family members were actively engaged in camouflaging the reasons of her return.

With time, however, pressure on Manuella to leave the country was increasing. Her appearance and the pretence of an imminent departure from Cameroon were crucial for her status. Without a plan for departure, her entire status as a bushfaller could collapse at any point and give way to accusations of laziness and uselessness.

### ***Remembering and narrating deportation: sex, marriage certificates and laissez passers***

The morning after the njangi meeting, Manuella explained to me in private the details of her return to Cameroon. As soon as Manuella came to my room, I had to find a means to ask Delphine to leave the place. It was the first and last time during the entire research period there was something I could not immediately share with my research assistant. Although Delphine later knew about the reasons of Manuella's return, out of respect she never spoke directly about deportation with Manuella.

In her narrative, Manuella closely connected the reason of her deportation to her failure to arrange for a wedding. Having escaped a (traditional) marriage in the village, Manuella had found herself undocumented in Switzerland with a (civic) marriage as the only way to gain papers. One of the means Manuella used to seek out boyfriends in Switzerland:

*If you start to find someone you end up sleeping with this man, sleeping with that man, sleeping with that man because you think they will give you papers. And that was the wrong idea they gave us.<sup>15</sup>*

As none of her boyfriends had agreed to marry her (or was in a position to do so), Manuella decided to prepare for a paper wedding (marriage of convenience) with a Swiss man. Yet she did not have enough time to follow up this procedure as she was intercepted beforehand and sent back:

*Beltha had to send documents for me; the documents to get married and all that. That was the last document I was waiting for to get married. And I just spoke with her some few minutes before I got arrested.*

As Manuella had gone to her official place of residence (the asylum home) to pick up her post, the staff at the counter told her to hold on and wait.

*Something told me it wasn't right.... And immediately I stood up to leave the office.... Pamp! Polizei!<sup>16</sup> The police had already come. They were really fast. Pamp! 'You are under arrest!' 'They kept me locked in for three days. There was no shower. They only allow you to have a shower after two days. You cannot shower every day.*

Manuella was arrested on the 3rd of April, but only arrived in Douala a week later.<sup>17</sup> Manuella was lucky that she had somebody in Luzern willing to bring her a suitcase with some of her belongings. The things packed in a rush by her Nigerian boyfriend are the things that she shared as presents. The rest of her belongings are still in Switzerland.

Manuella went from Zürich to Frankfurt and then had to sleep over several nights at the airport in Ethiopia before her flight back to Douala. In contrast to images of deportation in both activist and scholarly publishing that often portray people in shackles (De Genova & Peutz 2009), this was the way in which Manuella narrated her (forced) journey to Cameroon to me:

*Actually they know that you cannot go out because you need a passport to go out of the airport. So they don't follow you around. They actually let you do whatever you are doing. You can only stay in the airport for years, but you will never go out. That's what I know. It will be difficult for me to go out, so they didn't even follow me around. I actually bought some little things at the Frankfurt airport. One police guy helped me because they won't let me buy also if I don't show them my passport. You know – at the Duty Free.”*

This was the photo of Manuella in the clothes shop she had shown to all of us the night before. The policeman had taken this photo of her on the day of her deportation. Later I found this photo of her posted on her Facebook profile with the

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<sup>15</sup> The context of the interview I conducted with Manuella does unfortunately not give further information about who exactly Manuella is referring to here as 'they'.

<sup>16</sup> Manuella was using the German word for police, which is 'Polizei'.

<sup>17</sup> For the sake of Manuella's protection, the date has been slightly adjusted.

title 'shopping time'. It was next to other photos of her in Luzern. The visuals of this photographic memory of Manuella's day of deportation are striking. The photo is evidence of Manuella literally and figuratively dressing up her return trip to Cameroon. For fellow travellers, the full significance and actual nature of Manuella's forced journey was visible.

Upon her arrest, Manuella did not offer any resistance. 'I didn't want to fight with them. I even told them I wanted to go back.' Manuella added that her family would not have wanted her to be in prison again. 'I had wasted enough time.' She thus called her brothers after her arrest to inform them of her coming. During the seven days of her journey, it was unclear when their sister would arrive, but they knew somebody from their village of origin who worked at the airport. They thus prepared for a safe arrival of their sister by giving this contact person about 100,000 CFA (ca. 150 Euros).

The reaction of Manuella's brothers reflects a common understanding of how airport officials treat deported migrants. Another informant reasoned that she could hardly risk bushfalling because she did not have someone who upon her deportation would make sure that she would not end up in *New Bell*, an infamously reputed prison in Cameroon. Informants of mine told me of the extremely bad conditions in the prison. On her forced return after her failed attempt to travel to Kiev (see chapter one), Pamela, too, had destroyed her travel documents in the toilet of the plane before arrival in Douala. She explained: 'If not that, I'd still be in New Bell.'

Deporting states do not acknowledge that families and deportees have to pay the police (or other officials) upon arrival so as not to end up in prison.<sup>18</sup> Yet, even if technically and legally speaking, police officers do not have a right to hold up deported migrants, it is far from safe to trust the *laissez passer* to guarantee safe passage to deported migrants at their airport of arrival.<sup>19</sup> Referring to the *laissez passer* that she had been given in Switzerland, Manuella explained that,

*They had no right to hold me. But usually they just need any little motif to get money. That's why they didn't want these people to disturb me when I came. Because they always do that since they want money. And if you don't give them this money, they have every right to put you into prison or whatever ...*

That is why her brothers gave money to their contact person at the airport.

The irony is that documents that are issued through entirely legal procedures in countries of arrival do not always prove efficient at the airport in Cameroon. Although Manuella's *laissez passer* would have been classified by state officials as entirely legal, it was the contact person from her village that enabled her to leave the airport without having to go through harassment or making further payments to the Cameroonian police.

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<sup>18</sup> I am basing this on conversations with consulate staff from the German Embassy in Yaoundé.

<sup>19</sup> The irony is that documents issued through entirely legal procedures in countries of arrival fail in the Cameroonian context to be efficient. Although Manuella's *laissez passer* would have been classified as entirely legal, within the context of an airport in a country of departure, it did not have the powers that state officials in Europe might believe it to have.



### *Trying to leave again: the success and failure of migration*

The morning after the njangi meeting and just before coming to my studio, Manuella had already gone back to the immigration office in Buea and applied for a new passport. For now, Manuella was hoping to be able to return to bush through the paper marriage she had already begun to arrange when still in Switzerland. She explained that she preferred to pay the man for the marriage because it meant that she was free to marry another man for love later on. From day one, Manuella's life in Cameroon was geared towards a renewed departure.

This desire to leave the country again needs to be seen in relation to the bush-falling expectations that are levelled against migrants by their environment, but that she had herself, too. 'You see how my family is here? They are not really starving. But I would like their level to be up.' At my studio, Manuella shared how it was her dream to be able to buy a plot of land and build a house on it. 'Like that on my next visit, I can just stay in my own house. And have a shower there.'

Immediately after her return, Manuella's sister-in-law Beltha tried to put bush out of Manuella's head. Yet, the humiliation of deportation was too strong for Manuella. 'You know people here don't have anything going. They will just talk. They will make you feel like a loser. This thing is shameful. It makes you feel like a loser.' Like most other deported migrants, Manuella wanted to challenge what people thought of her. 'It's like you went to hustle, you went to be somebody and you didn't succeed. It's like a failure, like you failed. That's the problem. I feel like a failure.'

Manuella's deportation points us to questions of visibility in relation to the supposed success or failure of her migration and life trajectory. Manuella showed me a photo that her sister-in-law had shown to me on my first visit to one of Manuella's family houses in Buea. On the photo, Manuella is dressed in a spaghetti shirt and stands in front of a door. That is all. It looks like a very ordinary photo. Yet, Manuella tells me that the photo was taken during her first week in prison after her arrival. The walls of the prison – bare as they are – look better than the walls of many houses in Cameroon.<sup>20</sup>

As I have pointed out, Manuella's presence in bush had been a source of status and hope for the entire family, regardless of her daily reality in Switzerland. While details of Manuella's life in Switzerland were not visible for her social network in Cameroon, people's strong belief in bush even in the face of deportation needs to be compared to the overall life trajectories of migrants before migration and after deportation. The respective success and failure of a migration trajectory cannot be understood if the life trajectories of deported migrants *before* migration and *after* deportation remain hidden from sight. I will argue that Manuella's determination to leave again for bush after her deportation needs to be analysed from the vantage point of her migration trajectories before her journey to Switzerland.

Manuella, at the age of fifteen, was forced to move into the house of a man with whom her father had made a marriage arrangement. She was to be the wife

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<sup>20</sup> I do not know what her family knew of the context in which this photo was taken.

of a farmer in his mid 30s who lived in Babisi. Even though Manuella's mother was against the marriage and Manuella herself had suggested somebody else for marriage, her father had insisted on the match. The future husband had been the first to propose and to pay the bridewealth. After a few weeks of forced sexual intercourse in her new marital house, Manuella ran away from her village in the North West province to her elder brother's home in Buea.

After her escape, her elder brothers and sisters contributed money to repay the bridewealth that the father had received during the traditional wedding. In Buea, Manuella received training as a seamstress, but her brother refused when she expressed the desire to go to school. Manuella proudly told me that she managed to pay for her professional training school 'herself'. This meant that a boyfriend of hers had been willing to sponsor her for the training course.

After completion of the school, she had to complete a year's internship at a hotel. She was not paid during this period. It was thanks to a man she had met in the restaurant of the hotel that she was able to pay for her apartment, food, clothes and medical visits:

*My level had changed because I had this man that was really, I mean he was really sent from heaven. Because he really changed my life actually, that man changed my life. I was not that poor that time, so they [her brothers] were already looking at me at that time differently.*

It was thanks to the man she had met in the hotel in Douala that Manuella began to have a greater degree of control over her life. 'I needed help,' reflected Manuella on her courtship practices. Thinking back to the men with whom she has been, Manuella shared with me: 'I didn't get it from my parents. They [i.e. the men] were my own parents.'

It was also the money from this man that enabled Manuella to finance a substantial part of her bushfelling project.

*I thought I should better risk going rather than staying here because the guy who was helping me was a married guy; we had no future together. He didn't want me to go, but I thought we won't live together for a long time you know. This relationship must end one day and if it ends how do I live, how do I continue my life?<sup>21</sup>*

Manuella's decision to try and fall bush was driven by a quest for greater security in her life. She saw in bushfelling a risk, but at the same time the potential for a more long-term strategy for her life. Once she had made up her mind about bushfelling, she was able to persuade her brothers to add the remaining money.

Upon her return, Manuella's status vis-à-vis her close family members had changed despite the forced nature of her return. Manuella told me that they were treating her differently now. Before her departure, Manuella had been left at the mercy of boyfriends. Now, she felt she had a better position within her family. 'I

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<sup>21</sup> If this man had been in a position to marry Manuella, she might not have insisted on having to fall bush. Without paid work or the prospect of marriage, she figured that her life in Douala was not going to be sustainable in the long run.

feel special somehow and my opinion really counts, my opinion really counts in the family now.' Although her brothers owned houses and had children, Manuella was on a higher level than him because she had been to bush. She was a worldly person who had seen and achieved what her brothers had not yet been able to achieve.

Manuella's insistence on wanting to leave immediately after her deportation was also connected to the success that other bushfallers have had. Manuella had travelled out together with a friend. Although this friend had been initially much more scared and much less determined, she managed to arrange for a paper wedding with a Nigerian man. She has a child and works as a hairdresser in bush. She took the same risks as Manuella and in Delphine's words 'is fine now'.

Manuella was merely unlucky when compared to the destiny of this friend. The visible success and wealth of bushfallers in Cameroon makes it difficult for family members to understand the fate of people who are 'sent back' in other terms than bad luck and laziness.<sup>22</sup> Manuella needed to try and leave the country again to challenge what others were thinking of her.

### **Douala: levels of worldliness**

*I'm on a different level right now and I thank God for that. I'm not ungrateful. I really thank God for the experience that I had. But still I wish I could have accomplished my dreams - like other people they succeed in doing a lot [...], which I didn't.*

#### **'Maintaining one's level' after deportation**

After the first week in the hotel, Manuella arranged to move in with her brother Edward in Douala. Manuella did not want to go back to the village. She preferred life in Douala, in the anonymity of a big town where there was greater freedom for her. In Douala, she felt freer in her actions than in Buea. At the house of her brother in Douala, she was free to come and go as she wished – including at night.

While waiting and preparing to leave the country again, Manuella intended to use her time in Douala to pass her driving test and follow computer classes. Manuella did not want to work in the hotel business for which she had been trained. 'You work an entire month and at the end of the day,' she shared with me, 'you only have 30,000 CFA [roughly 50 Euros].' For such a small amount of money, it is not worth the effort. The monthly rent for a studio in Douala alone would cost about 30,000 CFA. For a short time, Manuella considered training as a nurse – a profession with

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<sup>22</sup> The shamefulness of deportation is related to the feeling of not having been able to achieve what one went out to bush to do, i.e. work and earn money.

an acute demand in bush. Yet, the training period would take two years, which was too long for Manuella. She needed to leave Cameroon before then.

With time, her Nigerian boyfriend in Switzerland stopped calling. Other friends in Switzerland were not calling either. The money in her savings account in Cameroon on which she was living was slowly decreasing. On a visit to Buea, Manuella told me about a new boyfriend. Her new man was married and according to her, 'gentle and generous'. He often took her out dancing and at regular intervals gave her money to buy new clothes. Sometimes he even took her and his friends for small trips to the countryside.

When in a fight with her boyfriend in Douala, Manuella explained how she would never allow this man to treat her like any other Cameroonian girl. Her connections to bush meant that she was now on a different 'level.' 'Ok, maybe I didn't have papers, but I've been out there. I've seen some things.' Manuella and her Cameroonian man never discussed the exact reasons for her return. Despite her deportation, bush had increased her status. In many ways, bush can be a source of status much beyond questions of remittances and legality.

As Manuella and I went second-hand shopping at the market in Douala, a salesman annoyed us with his bargaining strategies and Manuella responded with, 'I've been inside an H&M.' The sales man had not been inside an H&M and having been there made all the difference. Normally, she would not go about saying this, but as she explained to me: 'I was getting annoyed with the guys.' As we shopped for clothes at the market, we made a constant distinction between *Chinoiserie* and *okrika*. *Okrika* refers to second-hand clothes sent down from Europe. Even used, clothes from Europe offer better quality and a higher status than products from China (Séraphin 2000: 89-90). Manuella always bought *okrika*.

Levels of worldliness also come with expectations and pressures. On several of my weekends with Manuella in Douala, her boyfriend took us out dancing. One evening, her boyfriend had promised, but then failed to call us. While waiting at her brother's home, one of Manuella's very close friends from her time at the hotel dropped by and asked whether she could bring in two male family friends. Manuella was in shock and horror. She did not have money to pay for drinks! Only when her friend had assured her that her friends had not come to get invited did Manuella allow them to enter the house. As a bushfaller, she always had to be careful. Potentially, even men could claim or ask her for money.

As Manuella's boyfriend had still not called, Manuella eventually allowed both men to take us out for drinks. Later, they invited us to go dancing and, despite an initial hesitation, Manuella accepted the invitation. 'I do not want to fall too low. I want to respect myself,' she later explained to me. Manuella was not entirely at ease that other men were going to pay for us. For her sense of self-respect, it was better to only accept invitations from one man.<sup>23</sup>

'Soon,' Manuella told me, 'this fun and playing time will end.' In discussion at my studio in Buea, Manuella shared how much her mother would like her to have

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23 After a few hours of dancing at the cabaret, Manuella's boyfriend came in with another woman. He pretended that he was just about to call us to invite and bring us to the cabaret, too.

a child now. Some of her younger brothers already had their second child, while at 27 she had none. 'I'm not getting any younger. [...] I never thought I would reach this age without having a child. It's unbelievable where I am coming from.'

What was important to Manuella's mother in the village was neither her legal status in bush, nor her reason of return from bush, but whether or not Manuella was married and had given birth. Manuella's mother had lived all her life in the village of Babisi. When Manuella had left for bush, she and her brothers had not informed their mother about their attempt at bushfalling. Now upon Manuella's return, she was not informed about the reasons of Manuella's return either. Manuella had explained to me that her mother would simply not understand notions like deportation or residence permit. I will go on to suggest that means of evaluating status in Douala also need to be understood in relation to realities in the rural village of Babisi.

### ***The black bush and the status of an ajebotar***

Manuella's brother Edward ran a small commercial enterprise. His rented apartment had a living room, a small sleeping room, a storage space, a connecting room, and a small kitchen and bathroom. Upon Manuella's arrival, her brother and his wife moved to the hallway that connected the living room with the bathroom. Thus, Manuella could have her own room.

Manuella complained about the bucket showers in Edward's house. The lack of water to flush the toilet shocked her. She was in horror at the degree of fat in the food. She was no longer used to the way and style of people in Cameroon. She also did not like her sister-in-law's cooking. Manuella mildly commented that one could not blame her for it. 'She is from the village.' People from the village have not had the kind of exposure that she has had.

Manuella's sister-in-law summarised Manuella's new status for me in this way: 'There is more *ajebotar* in her.' *Ajebotar* is a Nigerian Pidgin term that has travelled to Cameroon via the locally produced movies on the Nigerian T.V. channel *African Magic*. The term refers to the luxuries and comforts that only members of the upper-middle class in West Africa can afford.

Beltha told me how Manuella struggled after her return to wash clothing by hand. Early in my stay in Cameroon, I confessed embarrassingly to Delphine that after five consecutive Sundays of spending hours scrubbing clothing by hand, I had given up on the exercise and had diverted to paying someone. She had laughed with pity and disbelief that I could find such an ordinary task too tedious to assume. Yet, Beltha viewed Manuella's struggle with hand-washing her clothes as a sign of achievement. 'Her level has changed. [...] Over there, machines do everything.' Manuella had become a little bit more of an *ajebotar*.

Instead of the cheap chewing gum that one can buy everywhere on the street for a mere 100 CFA, Manuella insisted on buying chewing gum from the bakery. While the cheap chewing gum from the road is called 'Hollywood', the chewing gum 'Leader Price' from the bakery truly comes from bush. Leader price is a relatively cheap brand of chewing gum in France; yet, its taste lasts longer than the

one of 'Hollywood'. Foreign brands confer status (Monga 2000: 201). As Manuella would smile and point out to me, it is a gum that makes you feel fresh again.<sup>24</sup>

Manuella preferred living in Douala because it offered her the greatest degree of *bush*-ness within the territory of Cameroon. People in the *black bush* already see the privileges and luxuries of life in the city as symbols of bush. In part, her efforts at setting up a new life in Douala were guided directly by her attempt and need to distance herself from village life. Yet, in some ways, her increase in status was also very real and not merely a question of perception management.

Beltha came from Babisi, the same village where Manuella was born. The wife of Manuella's brother was taking care of both their baby and a child that Edward had with another woman before his marriage. In contrast to Edwards' wife, Manuella was able to draw on savings she had sent back as an emergency fund to her brothers during her time in Switzerland. Sometimes Edward stayed out on a Saturday night without coming back. Whenever Edward forgot to leave money before going out at night, Manuella was able to give money to Beltha so that she could buy breakfast for the children. Manuella not only had greater status, but also a greater degree of independence, comfort and safety.

### ***Illegality, status and family connections***

Manuella changed her status and bettered her level in society. Nevertheless, she had not been able to live up to the dreams of bush. The humiliation of having been hindered and stopped so close to accomplishing her dreams remained with her, as well as others who have been deported from Europe. Although bush generates social status, the consequences of a deportation can be very difficult. Not everyone can keep the air of worldliness after a forced arrival back in Cameroon. Those at the very low end of society would not be able to camouflage the reasons for their return.

On one of our hunting trips for good pieces of *okrika* clothing in Douala, we ran into a frustrated and angry market seller who had been 'sent back' after having spent a long time seeking refuge in the church of St. Bernard in Paris. 'We leave to your place and all you ever ask is papers, papers, papers. You are asking too much. Does one ask you for your papers here?'<sup>25</sup> The Francophone market seller was frustrated to see me walking about freely. 'Our country is good, I will not go back.' While this angry man kept shouting at us, Manuella was quiet. She did not want to reveal her own trajectory. She kept calm and later responded that I was not asked for my papers in Cameroon because I had my papers.

Most deported informants with whom I was doing research managed to maintain a certain degree of dignity due to the help of other bushfallers that regularly sent back money or goods for sale. A female deported informant of mine (Mamie Comfort) was able to survive through the sale of beauty products that her younger

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<sup>24</sup> Freshness is precisely what is associated with bush. Informants would assure me time and again that staying in bush makes people 'fresh' and by extension their skin a little bit more 'light'.

<sup>25</sup> The conversation took place in French. The translation is mine.

brother sent her from the U.S. And both my male neighbours, who had been deported, also depended heavily after their deportation on the help of bushfallers in their family. It was only through family connections in bush that their rent was paid or that they could open small roadside businesses like, for example, a shaving stall. Deportation of some family members makes the help from other members in bush even more necessary.

Those deported without other family members in bush are hit hardest. After a few casual and short chats with one of the gardeners of my landlord, a man drumming the front door of my studio awakened me at four in the morning. He was shouting half in Pidgin and half in German that his life was at risk and whether I could let him in.<sup>26</sup>

It was the gardener. In our short chats, he had told me about his time in Germany. His forced return to Cameroon was connected to a brother that had bewitched him and a residence permit that had not been renewed. Now he was at my front door, hammering and shouting in German: 'Police! Police!'<sup>27</sup> In this late night enactment of the tragedy of a forced return, the trauma and desperation of these of these kinds of experiences was brought home to me. From what he was shouting that night, I gathered that he had gotten into debt after his return. Eventually, he left the compound, as the neighbours had asked him to.

Deportation creates impossible life styles in Cameroon. This was evident in the degree of desperation in his voice that night. The secrecy that surrounds deportation generates extreme solitude. Family connections are crucial for deported migrants to manage tensions between deportation, bush and status. Manuella was fortunate that her brothers and sisters did not judge her to be lazy, but rather saw her return as a matter of bad luck and continued to respect and admire her worldliness.

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<sup>26</sup> Original: 'I beg. Open the door. Es geht um mein Leben.'

<sup>27</sup> Original: 'Polizei! Polizei!'

## **Babisi: family expectations and marriage**

*'I will be thirty and for me it is a big deal. Ok for you it is not a big deal because you have been reading books since small and you have where you are going to. But for me what do I again? What do I get? Maybe if I have my children that will be my own PhD?'*

### **From bush to bush**

After her return from Switzerland, Manuella stayed four full weeks in Douala before travelling to see her father and her mother in the village. Since she fled her marriage in the village, she had only once returned to Babisi before falling bush in Switzerland. When in Douala, Manuella decided to travel to Babisi on the occasion of an important family event. One of her elder brothers had died in an airplane crash a year earlier and her family organised a memorial service in the village. The long time span of eight years and the additional wait of four weeks after her return from Switzerland clearly illustrate how difficult and uncomfortable a terrain Manuella's supposed 'natural' place of belonging had become for her (for this point see also Peutz 2006 and & Coutin 2010).

Manuella called me from the bus on her way to the memorial service. I was startled and didn't immediately understand what she was saying on the phone. In addition to the poor connection, she was speaking in German. We had never spoken German to each other. Her German was very good and extremely fluent. She had called to greet me, but I am sure her co-passengers must have turned their heads to see somebody speaking an unknown 'white man language'. Whatever the reasons for her return, she was somebody who made calls to bush people.

Among the hustle and bustle of the memorial service, her own reappearance in the village could easily drown and pass less noticed. Whether she was returning from bush in Europe or from the wealth and comfort of a town like Douala was hardly known or visible to those of the village. From the perspective of Babisi, even Douala represented many elements of bush.

When a few months later I travelled to Babisi myself, co-passengers in the taxi pointed out to me the bridge beyond which one was no longer connected to the world. 'As you enter here, there no longer is any network. Your phone does not have any use again.' Even though Manuella had not been able to fulfil her dreams in bush, it was clear that she was 'on a different level' than people in Babisi.

As a researcher I found it ironic that the ringtone of Manuella's mobile phone sang [njumboss@yahoo.fr](mailto:njumboss@yahoo.fr) (see preceding chapter for an analysis of the song). In the video, the heroine of the song is seen in the village dressed in a long dress for women (called *kabbah*) and then climbing the social stairs of upward mobility. Manuella and the heroine were united not just by an Internet-mediated marriage with either a white man or a bushfaller, but also the origins in the rural bush. After the difficult life in the village, the heroine of the song leaves for a better life in the



city. The nightlife is but a temporary phase on the heroine's way from the hard life of the village to marriage with a white man. In a similar fashion, Manuella not only compared her position after deportation to her existence in bush, but also to her origins in the black bush of the village.

While Manuella sought to distinguish herself from the black bush to maintain her level in Douala, she was brought closer to the global bush through connections with and in the black bush. In what follows, I will trace how Manuella received a marriage proposal from a man from Babisi who lived in the U.S. Manuella's migration trajectory demonstrates how intractably linked the different dimensions of bush and bushness are.

### *A bushfaller marriage and its repercussions*

Two months after her deportation, as Manuella and I were again going through piles of second-hand clothes from Europe at the market in Doula, she received a phone call. On the phone for a long while, it was quickly clear that this was a call from bush. Only people in bush have the money to make long phone calls. In Cameroon, calls are expensive and charged by the second.<sup>28</sup>

After the call, Manuella explained that it was an ex-boyfriend from her previous time in Buea. Elias, the caller, was from Babisi, but has been in the U.S. for almost four years. He had gone to bush only half a year before Manuella had left for Switzerland. At the time, he had made a marriage proposal to Manuella, but she had refused. Over the last few days, they have been talking over the phone discussing marriage plans. This time Manuella was willing to accept Elias's marriage proposal. 'Are you happy about this now?' Manuella asked over the phone.

The night before, Manuella had picked up his father at the airport. The father of Elias worked for an International Organisation in Nigeria and he was on a visit to Cameroon. Only a few minutes after hanging up, Manuella received a phone call from him. He was on his way out of town and wanted to see Manuella before he left. We took the next taxi and rushed to have a drink with him before he left. The marriage proposal from a bushfaller from Babisi had come suddenly, but not inconveniently.

We still go dancing that night, but the next day Manuella got up after only a few hours of sleep. She was too excited. She prepared to rush to see her elder brother in Douala to tell him her great piece of news. She was going to get married! On the phone, her sister-in-law Beltha was very pleased with the news. On the same day, Manuella rushed to the hair salon. She was intending to go up to Babisi on Wednesday morning. The traditional wedding would take place the following weekend. In the absence of her husband who was still in the U.S., the bridewealth would be handed over by representatives of the family of Manuella's husband.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> If not in bush or a bushfaller, you have to content yourself with making short phone calls. Thus the game between Delphine, her friends and later me, too, became one of trying to make phone calls that were as short as two or three seconds.

<sup>29</sup> As pointed out in the preceding chapter, it is a common for traditional weddings to be celebrated with one of the bushfallers absent.

'It's something else that I need from a man now,' explained Manuella to me about her decision to accept Elias's marriage proposal. 'I need to have a man that I call my own; not just date here and there.' Manuella was happy and content with her marriage plan. She had known Elias for over eight years. As he also came from Babisi, she figured they would easily understand each other. Manuella explained how her father-in-law was married to a woman from another village. 'The family is going out of track.' Thus, Manuella's father in law was eager to marry his son to Manuella, who was also from Babisi.

With the traditional marriage, many dynamics were changing for Manuella. 'I belong to them. If I die, I will be buried in their compound.' Manuella was now becoming the responsibility of her family-in-law. 'My brothers can still help me, if they want,' Manuella told me, 'but it is not their responsibility.' With this marriage, Manuella was onto new shores in more than one way. As she prepared to travel to the U.S., she no longer belonged to her family of origin. Similar to dynamics discussed in the preceding chapter, the bush of Babisi reconnected her to the bush of the U.S.

Manuella travelled up to the village for the second time after her deportation to get married. In the eyes of the inhabitants of Babisi, she was a clear success story. After coming back from bush for the first time, she was now travelling to Babisi to actually marry a bushfaller from the same village. A week later, Manuella showed me her marriage video. It is rare for traditional weddings to get documented by a video. Already this was a clear sign of status and success that can only be connected to bush.

Manuella wore a wrapper material, an elegantly and fashionably cut dress. To prevent gossip and comments from the villagers, she covered her shoulders by wearing a leather jacket on top of her wedding dress. The dress code was shaped by the manners and fashions of both the black bush, as well as the worldly bush.<sup>30</sup> Pointing to her elder sister all dressed up in wrapper, Manuella explained how her sister was 'used to life in the village.'

Three months after their traditional wedding, however, Manuella experienced her first disappointments. She was not sure when Elias would come to see her in person. He was not sending her money for her daily upkeep. Even when she had to go to Yaoundé to process her passport, Elias did not send her enough money. Manuella was only able to survive on her savings and on the additional help that she was still receiving from her boyfriend in Douala.

Nonetheless, Manuella received phone calls from some of Elias's aunts for money. They were expecting Manuella to have money, by her own doings or through Elias. If she declined, Elias's family members could suspect her of wastefully using and 'eating' Elias's money. After her marriage, both her family of origin and of procreation looked up to her as a bushfaller and were expecting gifts and financial support.

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<sup>30</sup> While the black bush is a term that is used in Cameroon, I introduce the term worldly bush here merely for analytical purposes so as to clearly distinguish between the two meanings of bush. Normally speaking, it is the context in Pidgin that determines what kind of bush is meant respectively.

A few days before a family meeting in Buea, Manuella came to visit me. She was down and sad. One cousin had asked her for a phone. Another would be returning to school. People around her were beginning to beg her for things she would leave behind after going back to bush. As I accompanied Manuella from my studio back to her brother's home, we came across a distant friend. 'What did you bring for me?' Manuella's well-rehearsed answer was: 'What I brought is already finished.'

Even though Manuella was not legally married to her husband, people were expecting her to go back to bush. The pressures on her were getting too high. Her savings were gone. She needed to leave the country. As a former bushfaller, life in Cameroon had become untenable for Manuella. Nevertheless, she was glad and fortunate that at least her marriage to Elias covered up the reason for her return to Cameroon and, more importantly her continued stay.

### ***Saying goodbye to your parents in the black bush***

The papers for going to the U.S. were taking a long time to be processed. Manuella hence decided to join her father-in-law in Nigeria while waiting to be able to travel to the U.S. When Manuella travelled to Babisi to say goodbye to her mother and greet her father in hospital, Delphine and I decided to accompany her there. It is Manuella's third visit to Babisi after her forced marriage eight years earlier and her second visit after her deportation half a year earlier.

As we reached Babisi, Manuella tried to avoid the market place so that she would not have to greet everybody. Even though the rain had stopped, Manuella was walking with her umbrella. It allowed her to hide her face. Not everybody knew, but most people would suspect that she was a bushfaller.<sup>31</sup> Before we went to the compound where she grew up as a child, she bought some sweets, drinks and biscuits.<sup>32</sup> The house in which she was raised was built of stones, but the house of her elder sister was made up of red earth. We dropped our belongings at the house of Manuella's elder sister and prepared to leave by bush taxi for the village in which Manuella's father was hospitalised.

Manuella was wearing high-heeled shoes and a white scarf around her shoulders. She carried a black handbag and a small office suitcase with her clothing. Delphine was dressed in jeans. The bag with food we brought to the hospital was so heavy that she had given up on elegance and style. The bag had ended up on Delphine's head. The night before when taking the overnight bus in Douala, all three of us had struggled to carry our bags from one bus station to the other. Yet, in Douala, both Delphine and Manuella had refused to balance the weight on their heads. This manner of carrying baggage was reserved for the village.

As we waited at the roadside for a bush taxi, I took some photos. Later Manuella told me that that one of the motorcycle drivers I had photographed used to be

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<sup>31</sup> This assumption was even strengthened on this specific visit where I was accompanying her as a white person to the village.

<sup>32</sup> People are used to kola nuts, but it is not every day that they eat biscuits and drink sweet drinks.

the husband of one of the daughters of her elder sister at whose house we had just been. Just like Manuella and her elder sister, Nathalie had been married in a traditional manner during her mid teens. She gave birth to two children, but when the beating increased she eventually fled the marriage.<sup>33</sup>

After having seen Manuella's father in hospital, we travelled back to Babisi to see Manuella's mother. Out of her eight children, only two were still living in the village. Manuella's siblings had offered to bring her to a house with electricity, running water and mobile phone network, but Manuella's mother had turned these offers down. She wanted to be close to the farm. She preferred living in her own bush. Although her leg was hurting her, she worked the fields every day.

The morning after, Manuella's mother gave her blessings for Manuella's journey to Nigeria. The first time that Manuella had left for bush, she had gone without informing her parents. This time she had her mother's blessing. As we walked with our luggage in a wheelbarrow down to the main road, we passed a villager who stood and stared. Afterwards, Manuella complained how everybody was just greeting and waiting as if she would always have money to hand out. While still waiting, a brand-new Mercedes passed. Delphine confirmed that this car could only be the car of a bushfaller or an official from the ministry in Yaoundé.

While we slowly travelled back on motorbike taxis to the nearest town where we could get a bush taxi, Manuella reflected on her life and her past in the village. 'It is a miracle to be where I am now!' She looked back to the village and thought of the life trajectories. The villagers' lives could have easily been hers. Like her elder sister, she could have been working the farm. Just like her niece Nathalie, she had been married at an early stage and without her consent.

Manuella might often be sad and frustrated. Yet, when thinking back to the life in the village, she still thought of her life as better. 'I'm just happy I'm married and that I belong somewhere.' Financially, she was not well off, but at least marriage was giving her a certain status and level of respect. 'I have a direction to go to.'

### **Abuja: sexuality and status**

*'I'm leaving now. I've just told my family if they ask, you people should just say she went back from where she came from.'*

#### ***Going back to where you came from***

Manuella's new direction was Abuja. Although the preparations for the legal wedding in Nigeria were advancing slowly, their project to have children was, for both,

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<sup>33</sup> At the time, Nathalie was in Yaoundé trying to earn a living as a seamstress. Manuella's marriage needs to be seen in relation to what marriage represents on a daily basis in Manuella's village of origin.

proof that they were serious about their marriage. Manuella had a wooden statue of a mother breastfeeding her child hanging on the wall of her room in Douala. She had also gone to see a doctor to stop contraception. Manuella's commitment and intention was clear, but Elias's behaviour created doubt. For instance, when Manuella's father fell seriously ill, Elias failed to react, call or send money.

When leaving Cameroon, Manuella told her boyfriend in Douala that she 'was going back to where she had come from.' He did not know about her traditional marriage with the bushfaller from Babisi in the U.S. At this stage, it was also not her imminent departure for the U.S. that was the most important element for Manuella. Given how long (eight months) Manuella had been staying in Cameroon after her deportation, it was high time for her to leave the country again. Referring to her U.S. visa, Manuella said: 'I knew that it will take a while, but then I didn't mind and I still even don't mind. As long as I could stay out of this country I don't mind, really I don't mind.'

When saying goodbye to her sister-in-law in Buea, Beltha told Manuella: 'Thanks to God, you're on a different level now.' Manuella replied that this was only true in a small way, but Beltha insisted that God had lifted her up at last. Beltha seemed to be joyful and proud that Manuella was now married again to a bushfaller. This time, she was not going to struggle the way that she had in Switzerland. In this way, Manuella left Cameroon on a positive note eight months after her forced return.

Manuella lived in the house of her father-in-law in Abuja, Nigeria. There she was in charge of preparing breakfast and a small dinner for him every day. Her husband again postponed his visit to Nigeria, yet had sent over money so that she could take evening classes. Manuella was thrilled to finally receive formal education.

Just before Christmas, she accompanied her father-in-law back on a visit to Cameroon. She called me, but I did not want to answer immediately because telecommunication in Cameroon is expensive. If Manuella was short of money, I preferred to call her back. I hesitated, but the phone kept ringing. When I finally did answer, she had guessed my thoughts: 'You can pick up the phone. I'm a bushfaller.' Merely staying with her family-in-law in Abuja gave her back the means to be and feel like a bushfaller.

Her family-in-law could hear us speak in German on the phone. Except for the fact that she was now 'walking with her family-in-law' and was no longer (as she put it) 'in control of her programme', her short visit in Buea resembled her earlier bushfaller visits directly after her return from Switzerland. She passed down clothing of hers to the children of her brothers, bought sweets for them, toys and soap for the newborn baby of the family. The fact that her return to the African continent had been caused by a deportation had almost become invisible at this stage. To a large extent, Manuella was capable of performing a bushfaller visit.

Four months after Manuella's departure, Elias finally came to Nigeria and they got legally married in Abuja. However, while waiting for Manuella's immigration visa to get processed in the U.S., communication between the couple deteriorated. When Manuella's mother was also in hospital, he failed to call her. Two months after the civic wedding of Manuella and Elias, I received an urgent phone call. I

could immediately tell from Manuella's voice that something was happening. It was a series of misfortunes.

First, her cousin came to stay in the house of her father-in-law in Abuja and had stolen money from the house to give to swindlers. She was now back in Cameroon. But this was not the reason Manuella called. Elias had told her about a Cameroonian friend in the U.S. who had called the police when his wife tried to leave him. Manuella told me that she did not want the life that she used to have in Switzerland in which she was always hiding from and afraid of the police. She also did not want to be a prisoner of her husband either.

Manuella was worried about her marriage and doubtful whether it was going to work out between her and Elias. A week later, Elias sent her a text message saying that he wanted to divorce. Now Manuella could no longer stay at the house of her father-in-law in Abuja. She was obliged to travel back to Cameroon. Manuella's divorce was a big shock to her family. This was the second time that she had left traditional marriage. With the disgrace of this divorce, life in Cameroon became even more impossible for Manuella. Strife and conflict broke out between Manuella and Elias's family. Blame for the divorce was put on her.<sup>34</sup>

While her family (of origin) asked her to stay in Cameroon, Manuella wanted to return to Nigeria. She called me up from Cameroon and again spoke German: 'It's not that easy to live here. I do really want to return – no matter what my family says.'<sup>35</sup> The humiliation and shame that went with repeated marriage failures in addition to her increasingly difficult economic situation would have been too much for her.

Manuella defied the advice of her elder brothers. Manuella was also driven out of the country by family expectations from more distant relatives. The family plays an interesting double role for bushfalling dynamics. Migration studies literature has documented how the need to take care of the family constitutes an important motivating factor in migration decisions (Stark & Bloom 1985; Massey et al 2005: 21- 22; and for the case of Cameroon, see Fleischer 2007: 434- 437 and Pelican & Tatah 2009: 239- 241). However, in Cameroon I often witnessed how young Cameroonians were trying to fall bush at all cost, like in Manuella's case, as a means to escape family pressures and expectations.

Delphine, too, would implicitly admit that family expectations drive people out of the country. She insisted that giving 1.5 million CFA to a broker was a better investment than buying herself access to the post of a civil servant. She argued that the physical intimacy to family members and their constant demands and pressures made it much more difficult for anyone to really establish him or herself in Cameroon. When in bush, there is always the choice of sending money home or not. Bushfalling can thus be both a way to flee and to satisfy the family.

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34 Her former husband claimed back the money that he had spent on her, as well as the money that was lost when her cousin had fallen prey to feymen in Nigeria. Manuella was angry and refused. Her father-in-law ordered her to come to Cameroon to meet him there for customary court proceedings. She had to give up on her classes and risked missing the deadline for signing up for the end-of-year exams. Yet, upon her arrival in Cameroon, the court proceedings did not take place. In the end, her father-in-law dropped the demands.

35 Original: 'Es ist nicht so einfach hier zu wohnen. [...] Ich möchte schon zurück – egal was meine Familie sagt.'

Despite the divorce, Manuella was determined to continue her studies in Abuja. While her family continued to think she was staying somewhere in Douala, Manuella secretly left for Abuja. Manuella and I continued to communicate over the phone and Skype. With time, Manuella won the sympathies and support of a politician in Nigeria. He started to cover her school fees and she moved into his house. In Abuja, Manuella was then able to pass her exams. At the end of the semester, she proudly sent me her exam results by text message.

Through the help of her new boyfriend in Abuja, Manuella also found a bush-falling line for her two brothers. Jonathan was supposed to go to Britain and Edward was supposed to go to Canada. 'This is something very big for my family. They are all excited now. It would be such a good thing for my family.' If it goes through, Manuella would be extremely proud that she did it. To offer these bush-falling lines was a way for her to redeem her own divorce. In the end, the brothers travelled to Nigeria, but the project did not go any further. When I asked Manuella about this, she replied: 'They are not serious. They don't have any money.'

The big surprise came when in February, I received another phone call from Manuella. It was a 0044 number. Manuella was in London! 'I didn't tell you because I wasn't sure.' Manuella had asked me for a letter of invitation to the Netherlands, but she had never followed up on the initial request. In fact, the British Embassy had denied her the visa twice, but then the third time it worked. She told me that she merely travelled to London 'to validate her visa.' She had a six-month visa with multiple entries. 'I will only be here for one week.' She was planning on returning for another visit soon. By collecting entry and exit stamps through frequent travel, Manuella was hoping to build up credit for a future visa application for the U.S. 'Next time, they'll know I'm a good client.'

Experience has taught Cameroonians to think of their passports in terms of a moral hierarchy of worthiness. With two validated U.K. visas, Manuella reasoned, she would have a better chance to obtain a Schengen visa and then be able to apply for a U.S. visa. For her, part of the cost of a U.S. visa was successfully obtaining a U.K. and a Schengen visa beforehand. For Manuella and other informants, there is a clear chronology and thus hierarchy of the worth of visas. While not a reflection of formal law, this hierarchy does fix the respective status and level of worldliness of a person.

I observed similar understandings of the various levels of power that a passport can attain through its visas with other informants, notably Delphine. When in Sweden for her MA, Delphine attended a conference in the U.K. only because she wanted to have a British visa in her passport. Many visas, and above all valuable visas like a British one would bring her closer towards global travelling after her graduation. As I hang up after my phone conversation with Manuella, I store her new number on my mobile phone under 'Manuella London'.

#### ***Trafficking numbers: 0034, 00237, 00234 and 0044***

The chapter opened with Manuella's forced return to Cameroon. Instead of her Swiss 0041 number, she suddenly had a Cameroonian 00237 number. In the above

sections of this chapter, I discussed the ways in which Manuella experienced, understood and reacted to her return. Particularly in view of the wider moral economy of bush and deportation, Manuella had to do her utmost best to return to 'where she had come from.' Through her passage to Nigeria, she acquired a 00234 number and eventually a 0044 number. Through these telephone numbers, she could again be identified as a worldly person.

Nation states define the supposedly 'natural' place of belonging, and deportation is based on these presuppositions. I propose that telephone numbers and telephones are an alternative means for Cameroonians to claim citizenship and construct belonging.<sup>36</sup> In this analysis, I have taken inspiration from Chu, who demonstrates how the notion of belonging is not just about physical travel and place of origin, but also about a particular way of "inhabiting the world" (2006: 396). As we shall see below, international numbers are highly valued goods with which people bargain and trade. For instance, phones that are presents from people in bush have a higher value than other – also imported – phones.

When still in Cameroon and only dreaming and fantasising about making it to bush, Delphine told me: 'The first thing that I will buy for my mum when I'm in bush is a phone.' It was not that Delphine could not have bought a mobile phone for her mother with the money that she was earning as a research assistant working for me. 'Anyone can buy a phone these days, but hers will be from bush,' explained Delphine. It is not the phone that matters here, but the place where it comes from and what that says about the person holding the phone. 'She will be holding it and she will know that the phone has come from bush.' Her mother does not have formal education. She cannot read and write. She does not speak English. 'When she is in a meeting and she has a phone,' Delphine explained, 'then her level will be seen as higher, because her phone will be from bush.' Telephones from bush are signals of a person's status and level of belonging.

In addition to phones from bush, international phone numbers are important status symbols. Now that Delphine was in bush, she vigorously watched over who had her Swedish mobile phone number or not. Her younger siblings were strictly instructed to first ask her permission before passing on her telephone number. On the one hand, Delphine preferred only selected people to have her number as a simple means of protection. She did not want to be bombarded and bothered with more requests for money and support. On the other hand, this traffic in numbers is also related to social status and belonging. When after fieldwork, I called to greet informants in Cameroon, I was often asked for my telephone number in the Netherlands. Again, Delphine was firm in qualifying whether or not I had been close enough to an informant for him or her now to have my telephone number. In

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<sup>36</sup> When arguing that Manuella's bushfaller status after deportation might also represent a claim to global citizenship, such a claim co-exists with other forms of belonging, such as for example the linkage that she is simultaneously upholding to her village of origin in the North West Province in Cameroon. For examples of how claims to autochthony are implicated and related in complex ways to globalisation, see (Geschiere 2009: 1–35; Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000). For examples of how migrants connect themselves to their native villages, see (Ndjio 2009; Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998).



her mind, she was always reasoning in terms of how this or that person would then go on to show off about having my number in their phone directory.

Having 0031 or 0044 numbers in your phone directory says something about the level of your connections and thus also your place in the world. A bush number in your phone directory is a source of pride because it manifests a connection to bush. In Ferguson's terminology, the constant quest of Cameroonians in Cameroon to know and have the international telephone numbers of bushfallers constitutes a 'claim for equal rights of membership in a spectacularly unequal global society' (2006: 174). With a national passport that gains little recognition on a global stage (and in this sense constitutes a hindrance to being granted a visa), bush numbers are guarded, protected and trafficked. International phone numbers have become an alternative means to identify the status and level of a person's connections.

When still on fieldwork in Cameroon, I had been puzzled by how often bushfallers were changing their telephone numbers. No visiting bushfaller was ever in a position to pass on his telephone number to me. The standard explanation was always that upon their return to bush, they were planning on changing phone provider and would thus have a new number. Citizenship is always based on inclusion and exclusion. For claims of belonging to upkeep their value, access needs to be selective. Most bushfallers were thus actively engaged in protecting their international phone numbers. Only the closest family members could be trusted with the international contact details of a bushfaller.

The importance of telephone numbers as claims to worldliness needs to be seen in relation to the current state of imposed immobility for many on the continent that is lack of visas and deportation. Many Cameroonians who try to leave the country fail to do so. Those deported will try to leave again for bush, yet most people will not manage to do so. The same is true for Mamie Comfort, whose case I will discuss as a contrasting case in the following section. Ten years after her deportation from bush, Mamie Comfort would constantly give me the telephone number of her deportation lawyer in the Netherlands and then ask whether I had contacted this lawyer. Years after her deportation, she continued to hold onto his business card. His 0031 number was with her.

### ***Deportability and sex***

Mamie Comfort was deported after six months of hustling in the Netherlands. I met her through a common friend who looked up to Mamie Comfort – a woman in her late thirties – for useful advice on bushfalling. When telling her story about her time in the Netherlands, Mamie Comfort always stressed how close she had been to marrying one of the men she had been dating in bush. To Mamie Comfort, deportation was a question of bad luck and courtship was a way of actively working towards one's luck. Her stories of courtship in bush served as proof that she had not been idle. She had not been lazy, but merely unlucky that she was sent back before she had been able to marry.

While it is impossible for me to draw overall conclusions on how experiences of being deported differ by gender, Mamie Comfort did point out to me certain

aspects of her deportation trajectory that she experienced as specifically linked to her status as a woman. First of all, as a female bushfaller, she told me, one is expected to return not just with money, but also with a husband and potentially with children. She had given birth to one child in her late teens. Yet she had returned from bush without money, without goods and without a husband. Her status in society upon her return was very low. She imitates people's reactions to her after her forced return: 'Who are you? Are you a woman? You can't give birth again? [...] Because coming back without having brought something back, you are in trouble – especially when you are a single woman.'

Mamie Comfort's statement reminds us of the importance of family dynamics and social expectations for the way in which forced returns are experienced and perceived in Cameroon. The family largely decides which aspects of deportation become visible and which ones remain invisible. Evaluations of returns depend on marriage, childbirth and the capacity of returned bushfallers to maintain connections to bush despite their return.

Even though Mamie Comfort was deported after only six months, she suffered greatly from bad rumours upon her return to Cameroon.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Manuella, she did not have the necessary skills and support from her family to be able to capitalise on her stay in bush in the ways that Manuella did. Mamie Comfort could not keep her forced return a secret. Until recently, she did not have a family member in bush – only an older sister who was trading with bush. Mamie Comfort did not therefore have the same security net that my deported neighbours had. For years, she suffered from bad gossip and social prejudice.

Mamie Comfort told me that she found subsequent marriage attempts in Cameroon hindered through the social stigma of deportation. She suggested to me that her status as a deported migrant woman put her moral credentials in doubt and made her subject to accusations of feymania:

*Whenever they see somebody who wanted to go out with me, they will tell him don't go out with her. She went to Europe and she was repatriated. And so she will just take money from you and go to Europe. It was Europe, Europe, Europe! If I'm with any man, they will tell him she will take your money and go back. She will collect money from you and go back.*

Unlike Manuella, Mamie Comfort was never again able to convince state authorities that she was in Manuella's words 'a good client'. Her visa request with the U.S. Embassy to look after her brother's child in the U.S. was turned down. And her visits to dating sites and requests to help her look for a white husband had not borne fruits either. Both for Manuella and Mamie Comfort, access to their preferred place of residence was crucially linked to courtship and marriage. Just like the heroine in the Njumboss song, escape from the hard life in the village neces-

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37 The longer a bushfaller has been to bush, the higher the expectations and demands on the part of his family are likely to be upon his or her return.

sarily passes through men. In many ways, sexuality for women is crucial for access to legality in bush.<sup>38</sup>

The vulnerabilities of so-called 'trafficked women' are mostly conceived of in terms of their sexuality.<sup>39</sup> What we can see in the case of Manuella and Mamie Comfort is how the state of deportability has created a new set of vulnerabilities for both of them. Already dependent on boyfriends for survival before falling bush, Manuella's scope for legalising her stay after bushfalling depended on a boyfriend being willing to marry her. After deportation back to Cameroon, her dependence on men for survival continued. Yet, now the moral economy of deportation – characterised as discussed above by secrecy, camouflage and shame – made her life in Cameroon untenable. She depended on her new boyfriend in Abuja to both sustain and help her for her future travels.

### **Bad luck, bad behaviour and laziness**

Cameroonians view deportation as a result of bad luck, bad behaviour or laziness. When the police apprehended an undocumented informant in the Netherlands, I was surprised to see no changes in the attitudes towards bushfalling with her family members in Cameroon. Even though their sister was in the hands of the police, my informant's younger siblings continued with their original plans of giving their sister's money to a migration broker so they could also fall bush. The brother of my informant regarded his sister's failure to obtain her papers in bush as a result of being just a woman. Women are not smart or strong enough to fight for their papers.<sup>40</sup> He was convinced that had it been him who had been in bush for so long, he would have already established the connections that it takes to get papers. Implicit in his view of his sister's failing was that she was too lazy or weak. The younger sister of my informant also remained untouched by her sister's fate. She thought her sister was merely unlucky. The mother of the informant was not

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<sup>38</sup> I have already discussed in the marriage chapter (ch. 5) how marriage constitutes an access route to bush for women, but not for men. This also has consequences for the ways in which the effects of deportation can be remedied for both men and women.

<sup>39</sup> Sources of vulnerability that are related to legal frameworks in receiving states are rarely seen and given their importance (Alpes 2010; Kapur 2005; Anker & van Liempt 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Paper controls in bush are understood against the backdrop of what papers means, how one gets them and how they are regulated in Cameroon. Controls of identity cards, for example, are extremely common in Cameroon. Several road blocks interrupt any journey to a neighbouring town. Ever varying authorities control identity cards and other forms of documentation for the taxi drivers. The ensuing conversations in the communally shared bush taxis are very open and often very explicit in their discussion of financial details. It is commonly understood that policemen take it in turns and at times even pay higher officials for the right to conduct these road controls. All passengers know that taxi fares cover whatever financial transaction necessary between taxi driver and policemen. It is also common public knowledge that police controls of identity cards intensify just before Christmas and before the start of the new school year. It is during these times that official authorities have the greatest need for additional sources of revenue. For a more detailed discussion of different types of roadside controls, see Arifari (2006).

so much concerned about potential deportation than about her daughter still not being married. Such a continued state of celibacy caused a moral problem of social standing and behaviour.

In the end, the police released my informant. Instead of assuming that illegality caused deportation, the family members focused on the success of their sister – proven by the money she had sent for her younger siblings' own bushfalling project.<sup>41</sup> My surprise at the reactions of my informant's family members was based on my own assumptions – namely that there is an almost automatic logic to the application of legal frameworks. My fear about the potential deportation of my informant was informed by a legal consciousness that presupposed that illegality is the cause of deportation.

Deportation is constructed in Europe and the U.S. as the logical and thus legitimate response to the phenomenon of unauthorised migration.<sup>42</sup> Yet there is a gap between large financial investments in immigration detention and the actual rate of physical expulsions of migrants from the territory. At one level, one can explain this gap through legal complications that hinder the implementation of expulsions. Yet, at another level, deportation policy is arguably less driven by the actual intention to remove undocumented migrants from national territory, but rather by the need of politicians and government officials to manage popular anxieties and to assert state control at a symbolic level (Leerkes & Broeders 2010).

I want to go further and suggest that low rates of deportation stimulate us to spell out and provincialise the legal consciousness that feeds deportation policy in Europe. Academia studies what people say and do about law under the umbrella of legal consciousness (Silbey 2005; McCann 2008). Scholars of legal consciousness study understandings and meanings of law as they circulate in social relations. Perceptions or images of deportation as a policy instrument do not express aptitude, knowledge or competence. Instead perceptions, images and beliefs all form an integral part of the collective construction of legality. Legality is a wide range of constructed meanings only loosely tethered to legal texts and their official interpretations and applications in institutional contexts. The assumptions, norms and belief systems on which these social meanings of the law are based are the backbone of the legal consciousness of people within a specific temporal and geographical context.

Contemporary beliefs in Europe presuppose that illegality causes deportation. Illegality is an important precondition for deportation. Without illegality, there cannot be (legally-sanctioned) deportation. However, as low deportation rates demonstrate, illegality does not immediately cause deportation. For an undocumented person to be deported, he or she needs to be apprehended by the police

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<sup>41</sup> According to Boussichas, undocumented migrants might remit less money, but bring back more savings than documented migrants. For a quantitative analysis of how documented and undocumented migrants remit differently in the U.S. Mexican context, see Boussichas (2009).

<sup>42</sup> In contrast to this understanding of deportation as a mere logical response, Walters brings to the surface in his argumentations that deportation is in fact a 'legalised form of expulsion' and that deportation law is founded on a series of legalised discriminations (Walters 2009: 69–101).

which in its turn is more or less likely dependant on the gender, skin colour and/or work place of the respective migrant.

A metaphor can illustrate better how and why illegality is a mere precondition, but not a cause of deportation. A legal consciousness that attributes causal powers to the element of illegality, for example, is similar to an argument that insists that road accidents are caused by driving. Although most road accidents presuppose driving, the actual causes of accidents are irresponsible behaviour, inattention, alcohol and/or a lack of skills.

De Genova has argued that the deportation regime is effective not because a few migrants are expelled from the territory of the state, but because the regime as such engenders the constant state of deportability (2002). All undocumented migrants at all times are potentially subject to deportation and thus more vulnerable.<sup>43</sup> This vulnerability, according to De Genova, renders deportable migrants attractive employees. While the focus of my own work rests with the ways in which migrants themselves and their families understand and relate to deportation, the distinction between deportation and deportability does help to illuminate common conceptions of the causes of deportation in Cameroon.

Deportability, for example, lets the Cameroonian interpretation of deportation as caused by luck appear in a different light. Although all migrants without appropriate documentation are subject to deportation, only some actually do get deported. These are the unlucky ones. If one focuses on individual probability, it makes sense to interpret the likelihood of deportation in terms of chance. Despite the rhetoric of border control, deportation is *de facto* not the supposed systematic result or automatic consequence of illegality.

Within the moral economy of deportation, bad luck can both be entirely contingent or the fault of a person because he or she behaved badly or was lazy. The concept of deportability (and its inherent argument that migrant labour is desired in its vulnerable and deportable form) helps to understand these interpretive frameworks of bad luck and laziness. Bushfallers who behave badly or do not work hard enough get sent back because they are lazy. Their workforce is no longer desired.

When discussing deportation with my research assistant, Delphine used to tell me that her parents and people in her quarter believed that one gets sent back from Europe for acts, like for example 'peeing' on the street or 'aggressing' women. Deportation in this view is experienced as a type of sanctioning of a moral kind of citizenship. Only those who behave well were allowed to stay. In these cases, deportation is said to be the personal fault of the deported person.

The causes of deportation that Delphine's parents speak of are remarkably gendered. It is men who are said to be deported for having peed on the streets and for being aggressive with women. While, legally speaking, neither offence constitutes a legal ground for deportation, the gendered nature of these causes of

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43 The presence of migrants in receiving states is desired in this 'deportable' state because it is this deportability that renders their work more attractive to the societies in the places they live and work (De Genova 2002).

deportation can be said to reflect dynamics of deportation policy.<sup>44</sup> Controls for deportation are often conducted in publicly open work spaces. Migrant women that work as cleaners or care givers within the realm of private homes or do unpaid domestic work – as girlfriends or aspiring wives – are less exposed to the dangers of actual deportation.<sup>45</sup>

The deported migrant women with whom I talked in Cameroon explained repeatedly and vehemently the cause of their deportation as their failure to marry. Whether within an interview situation or in a more informal encounter, their narrative of deportation always started with an account of how they had sought out marriage and how they had been very close to having gotten married. De facto, marriage to a national or to somebody with a residence permit will in most cases confer rights to the spouse in question. As such, deportation is experienced as having been caused by the failure to marry and not by the absent residence permit.

## Conclusion

Media and policy debates often argue that people in West Africa would not migrate if they knew more about life in Europe. Through the detailed case study of Manuella and the other contrasting cases in this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate what otherwise is invisible from the standpoint of the receiving nation state in Europe. Details about Manuella's forced marriage in Babisi, her alleviation to more high-scale dating due to her connections to bush upon her return to Douala, as well as the impossibility of her life in the place of her state-defined 'natural' place of belonging are all aspects that remain largely invisible to the spectator in Europe. On the basis of this research, return programmes for so called 'trafficking victims', but also general deportation programmes, might want to consider the sexual economy into which returned migrant women are placed upon arrival in their country of nationality.

Deportation creates vulnerabilities for migrants – which in the case of deported migrant women have direct consequences for the ways in which they can and have to engage in courtship practices, marriage intentions and childbirth plans. While Manuella had already escaped a forced marriage in her teenage years and survived with the help of men before her travel project to Switzerland, her forced return to Cameroon aggravated her situation. After deportation, life in Cameroon became impossible for Manuella. Her escape route was a marriage with a bushfaller in Nigeria. Yet, even when her bushfaller marriage fell through, Manuella opted to stay

44 In this sense then, deportation policy is efficient because it reminds migrants that their deportable status obliges them to work hard, behave well and in the case of women, to stay within the 'private' realm and seek the protection of a husband.

45 An officer at the information and transparency office at Frontex informed me that they unfortunately do not generate gender-specific deportation statistics.

with a new boyfriend in Nigeria rather than return and face up to family pressures, bushfaling expectations and the lingering suspicion and shame of deportation.

The case studies of Manuella and Mamie Comfort have placed the act of deportation into a longer time period, as well as into its social context in Cameroon. Manuella was not merely an undocumented migrant woman who failed with her asylum request and was subsequently deported back to her 'natural' place of belonging. As we saw in Manuella's case, a forced return is by far not the end of migratory ambitions. From the geographical standpoint of Cameroon, Manuella's deportation was only one moment in time. As such, the act of deportation should not be overestimated as a potential solution to dynamics of so-called illegal migration. The overall meaning and significance of both her migration to Switzerland and her later deportation need to be seen in relation to her life before and after deportation.

Despite the shame of deportation, Manuella remained in many ways a worldly person able to overcome (even if only for a short while) the exclusions imposed through the current migration regime. In the context of her deportation (which in Ferguson's or Nyers' terms could also be described as a state of abjection),<sup>46</sup> Manuella's *ajebotar* ways of clothing and eating served to maintain and prove her worldliness.<sup>47</sup> This continued bushfaller status was possible through active moves on her part to camouflage the reason of her return, as well as her courtship and marriage strategies. The length of the stay abroad, family connections (also to bush), as well as courtship and marriage all determine whether or not deported bushfallers can safeguard the secret of the nature and reason of their return.

The chapter has also elaborated on other frameworks for evaluating the respective success or failure of a migrant woman than the one of legality. Although deeply shameful, a forced return does not constitute the ultimate failure. Because Manuella married a bushfaller after her deportation and was able to leave the country, her overall migration trajectory was still perceived by most of her acquaintances as a success. Marriage and childbirth constitute two important moral yardsticks in Cameroon according to which family members and society will evaluate the relative status of a migrant and a female migrant in particular. Sex and marriage do not only determine social status, but also serve to fix a person's place of belonging. Once Manuella had married her American bushfaller, she belonged to his family and thus she moved to Nigeria. Regardless of whether or not Manuella was already legally married, her family expected her to then rejoin her husband in the U.S.

In reference to regimes of belonging, I return to the anecdote with which I began this chapter – on the bushfaller who got shot by the police. The life of a bushfaller is worth more than the life of an ordinary Cameroonian because a bushfaller has been able to realise worldliness. The life of a 'big man' in Cameroon is also worth more than the value of an 'ordinary' man. Both have gained access to

46 'Abjection refers to a process of being thrown aside, expelled, or discarded. But its literal meaning also implies not just being thrown out but being thrown down – thus expulsion but also debasement and humiliation' (Ferguson 1999: 236). For a discussion of abject cosmopolitanism, see (Nyers 2003: 1072–1075).

47 Ferguson talks about a claim to global belonging and a refusal to accept the current state of abjection (Ferguson 2006: 174–5).

another level of belonging. Going to bush 'à tout prix' is thus not just the pursuit of illusions and dreams. It also is the quest for status and global inclusion. Even if only in its deportable form, bushfalling as a form of labour migration offers the promise of increasing the worth of one's life.

The above explanations go a long way in explaining why both the possibility of deportation and deportation itself do nothing to destroy or limit the attractiveness of bush. We have seen that narratives of return are carefully managed both to avoid shame, but also to be able to keep drawing on the asset of having and being connected to bush. The costs it takes to get to and remain in bush render the enterprise so very profitable in terms of the status and benefits it procures. I wish to go further and suggest that deportation reinforces the worth and value of falling bush at all cost. If bushfalling includes the possibility of deportation, migration can potentially become more beneficial if several family members hustle together in bush. In this sense, deportation does not discourage migratory decisions, but makes the migration of other family members of undocumented migrants in Europe all the more necessary.

Policy makers assume that higher deportation rates would discourage undocumented migration because they assume that illegality is a relatively immediate cause of deportation. In Cameroon, however, bad luck, bad behaviour and laziness are said to cause deportation. While bad behaviour and laziness imply the fault and responsibility of the deported migrant, bad luck does not. All three causes are linked to the traits of individual people. Whether the fault of an individual or not, deportation is always potentially shameful, but never structural. Deportation does not call into question the belief of the profitability of bushfalling because its causes are rooted in the individual.

The rhetoric of migration policy locates the fight against so-called 'illegal migration' at the core of the rationale of deportations. This chapter concludes that deportations do not so much flow out of the condition of illegality, but construct the notion of illegality. The question of why aspiring migrants continue to fall bush in the face of the danger of deportation stems from and even feeds into a belief that attributes a quasi-automatic power to migration law. Through a critical analysis of the narratives of bad luck, laziness and bad behaviour, I have located illegality as a precondition, but not direct cause of forced return. The moral economy of deportation in Cameroon has allowed me to unravel the legal consciousness that feeds into and comes out of migration policy.



## Bush at all cost: Migration trajectories at their point of departure



12. Bar in Bamenda: 'Ambassador'

*'I really wish my parents had been caught during the slave trade. They would have directly given birth to me as a bushfaller and I wouldn't have had to suffer the way that I am now suffering.'*

The quote comes from a roughly 19 year old boy who spoke to my research assistant Delphine at a roadside store in a small seaside town close to Buea. While the boy was not basing his statement on an actual evaluation of working and living conditions of West African slaves in the past, his statement is indicative of the terms in which he is experiencing his existence in Cameroon today. For him, to be obliged to live in Cameroon is to suffer. The young man certainly also expressed a preference for slavery because he idealised life in the West. Yet, his statement cannot be limited exclusively to this. His statement also refers to the fact that many descendants of slaves are now American citizens. As such, they are in a better position to take care of themselves and their families. And just like bushfallers, they are free to travel through the world.

This book is written in reaction to, on the one hand, trafficking and smuggling discourses in Europe, and, on the other hand to the strong belief in the possibilities and potentials of bushfalling I encountered in Cameroon. My dissatisfaction with trafficking and smuggling discourses inspired me to empirically research perceptions of potentially exploitative labour migration among people directly involved in an area of departure. My research has demonstrated that women's migration trajectories are not just characterised by vulnerabilities, but that in certain respects their strategies - for instance in relation to courtship and marriage practices - are also enabling. Furthermore, this thesis has demonstrated that it would be mistaken to assume that migration is the act that creates vulnerabilities in the first place.

I wanted to avoid being prejudiced by notions of exploitation and abuse that are commonplace in countries of arrival. Therefore, I first focused on horizons of expectation of aspiring migrants. Placing these in a wider context, I illuminated how state institutions, migration brokers and family members interact to shape the context in which migration trajectories take shape. I argued that the dependence of aspiring migrants on multiple regulatory authorities produces contradictory expectations and pressures. This multiple dependence can help to understand what makes young Cameroonians migrate at all cost. Market, family and state authorities compete with each other over the regulation of movement.<sup>1</sup> This competition has currently distributed migration costs unfavourably towards migrants rather than states or families.

In this conclusion, I begin by recapitulating the theoretical and methodological stakes at play in the preceding chapters. In the second section, I illustrate how a study of socio-economic exchanges, sexuality, marriage practices, and migration brokers in Cameroon can shed new light onto the discourse and politics of human trafficking. In the third section, I explain through locally available terminology why certain warnings against going to bush at all cost do not fall on fertile grounds within the moral economy of departure in Cameroon. I do so by analysing local perceptions of success and failure; flows and interpretations of information; as well as conceptions of access paths to bush and the respective place of the law. I will conclude by opening up my work on migration and vulnerability towards questions on the governance of migration and the distribution of social risks.

## **Political anthropology of migration**

The paradigm of trafficking has given birth to unfounded representations of why and how young women in West Africa seek out migration. To explain local perceptions of potentially exploitative labour migration as well as bushfalling at all

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<sup>1</sup> This becomes visible in conflicting views on legitimate forms of paper production, multiple meanings of monetary transfers and normative assumptions around marital unions.

cost, I ethnographically studied the factors and actors that lower or heighten the capabilities of aspiring migrants to realize their ambitions of mobility. This is an important move because the recent literature on transnational migration often fails to deal with legal constraints (Conway 2000; Carling 2002: 10). Through a political anthropology of migration, I have thus integrated the effects of migration control into my explanations of how migration flows are shaped, both by the authorities on the spot and the potential migrants.

### ***High aspirations and low capabilities***

The particular focus of my research was on the attempts of people in countries of departure to become migrants (Carling 2008: 1455). This transition is extremely volatile. In the preceding chapters, we have witnessed the attitudes of Delphine, Pamela, Victorine, Nuretta, Josephine and Manuella towards migration brokers, family members and state officials. As one of my key informants, Delphine was the only one able to achieve her ambition and dream of falling bush. At the end of fieldwork, Pamela and Victorine stayed behind and Manuella had been deported back to Cameroon. Thus in this study, I have analysed migration choices and evaluations from the vantage point of enforced transcontinental immobility.<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of fieldwork in Anglophone Cameroon, this study brought forward an ethnographic description of the world in which young un-married women from Anglophone Cameroon aspire to leave the country. I focused on how young Cameroonians translated migration aspirations and decisions into actual emigration trajectories (Carling 2002:10). I used the notion of multiple regulatory authorities (Roitman 2005) in order to overcome the limiting idea - more or less implicit in many studies of migration - of the state as the main or even the only authority involved. Instead, I analysed how state, family and market created a complex configurations that constrain migrants in their initiatives. To trace constraints by different authorities, I followed how aspiring migrants deal with paper, marriage and money.

My focus on the different meanings and implications of paper, marriage and money within trajectories of departure allowed me to study why people aspire to migrate, but also how in the context of low migration capabilities, they seek to establish a degree of control over the outcome of their emigration attempts. Based on Sen's theoretical work on development (1999), de Haas defined migration capabilities as 'the social, human and material capital individuals are able to mobilise in order to migrate' (2010a: 16). As a study of migration capabilities, my research addressed both the actions that aspiring migrants took to establish control over the outcome of their migration trajectories (Wong 2005: 87), as well as the 'structural frame of opportunities and barriers' in the context of which aspiring migrants sought to leave the country (Carling 2002: 26).

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Cape Verdian experiences, Carling, in particular, has stressed the theoretical importance of studying migration also from the vantage point of involuntary immobility (2002: 6).

In this study, I suggest that migration currently manifests itself in Cameroon in the form of bushfalling because high aspirations for migration combine with relatively low capabilities. To understand the making of high aspirations and low capabilities, it is crucial to study the regulation of emigration ethnographically.

### ***Ethnography of the regulation of emigration***

Given the difficulties of departure, I wanted to research how the governance of migration is conceived of and experienced by aspiring migrants. To achieve this, I have combined the methodological tools of anthropology with a political interest in the regulation of migration. I have come to frame this research as an ethnography of the regulation of emigration.

First of all, both my interest in local perceptions of trafficking and smuggling, as well as my curiosity about what makes young Cameroonians migrate at all cost required an ethnographic approach. I chose to work ethnographically because I wanted to know how aspiring migrants and their family members experience the regulation and governance of migration. Rather than studying migration through the categories and lenses of the state, I opted to study the state's regulation of migration ethnographically and especially from the point of view of migrants. Through this ethnographic approach, I attempted to see the state without 'seeing like the state' (Scott 1998).

Secondly, I focused on emigration because I wanted to shed light onto migration trajectories from a novel geographical and temporal standpoint. My focus on conditions of departure has allowed me to counter-weigh the heavy bias on immigration in migration studies (De Genova 2002; Bourdieu & Wacquant 2000). Instead of looking at migration as immigration, I studied the coming into being of emigration trajectories.

Thirdly, I focused on regulatory dynamics because I wanted to shed light onto the processes that decrease migrants' potentials to have control over the outcomes of migration trajectories. As stated above, I focused particularly on the regulation of migration through a plurality of regulatory authorities (Roitman 2005). Interested in the sphere of state, market and family, I ethnographically looked at the ways in which migration is regulated by migration brokers, state officials and family members. I have coined this ensemble as regulation and these actors as regulatory authorities.

Emigration trajectories take shape both because migrants make choices and because other actors (such as migration brokers, consulate officers, other state officials and family members) make demands on migrants and connote migration trajectories as respectively legal, legitimate, profitable and/or their opposites. By studying the hurdles and openings in young people's quests for mobility, this study has sought to theorise the structural context in which trajectories of mobility are attempted and pursued.

### ***The construction of the state's monopoly of the legitimate means of movement***

Interactions and frictions between different actors help to explain how the costs of migration are produced. In this study, I examined competing moves, but also overlaps between different regulatory authorities. My conclusions demonstrate how the state's monopoly over the legitimate means of mobility is continuously in the making.

State actors use different strategies in trying to monopolise and thus legitimise state authority. To do so, state authorities need to distinguish themselves from other authorities. They accusingly ascribe monetary motives to migration brokers and family members. Yet, money plays an important role within embassies, too, and migration brokers do issue travel papers that enable people to travel. The analysis of this study has hence suggested that boundaries between market, state and family need to be studied as constructions that serve a function, rather than as self-evidently distinguishable spheres.

State authorities also seek to monopolize their power position through spatialising techniques.<sup>3</sup> The spatialisation of the state's position as all-encompassing in terms of spatial scope and 'above' in terms of vertical height feeds into the construction of state power as superior in terms of interests, knowledge and moral purpose (Ferguson 2006: 92). In the chapters on consulate offices and marriage migration, I demonstrated how state authorities actively engage in the legitimization and delegitimation of mediating practices. In drawing boundaries between its own practices and those of other actors, state authorities construct vertical and moral superiority. By default, family members are imagined as below the state and as narrowly representing only limited interests.

Imaginations of how authority formations are spatialised contribute heavily to the legitimization or delegitimation of actors and their instruments of regulation. We have seen, for example, in the chapters on visa applications and marriage migration, how accusations of commerce and crime against migration brokers and of fraud and selfishness vis-à-vis migrants and their family members serve to represent the state as being morally superior. The moral and spatial superiority of state authority relies on the ideal-typical construction of state power as vertically above and spatially all-encompassing (Ferguson 2006: 92), but is also grounded in combats against fraud, selfishness, illegality and criminality.

Accusations of fraud and selfishness feed into the construction of the state's monopoly over the legitimate means of movement by delegitimizing and constructing other regulatory authorities as morally inferior and less universal in their represented interests. When one tries to study the construction of the apparent monopoly for legitimate mobility control, one can recognise how state authority is implicated in the production of fraud and selfishness that it ascribes to others. It is not just the border spectacle of migration control (De Genova 2002), but also the necessity for the spectacle that is created by state actors.

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3 This spatialisation of state power is produced through routine bureaucratic practices (Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

Migration restrictions, for example, make marriage a more prized means of migration. This makes it even less likely that marriage will be based on 'pure love'. In this way, all international marriages come under suspicion. This suspicion then justifies controls, interviews, tests and extra procedures. At the same time that state policies transform marriage into a desirable migration tool, the discourse around border control stresses the sacredness of the matrimonial union and 'pure love' as its only legitimate foundation.

Studying the construction of the vertical height of authority formations furthermore allows us to become aware of how some of the key terms through which we are used to look at migration are framed by state authorities in ways that legitimise its own authority. The term fee, for example, legitimises monetary transfers to consulate officers – even when the visa is not granted. By contrast, the term price delegitimizes monetary transfers to migration brokers – even if the travel project is successful. As scholars of migration, we can only begin to grasp the nature of the political and moral economy of migration if we agree to give up constructing our analysis from the assumed monopoly position of the state.

In the coming two sections, I will discuss belief systems that come out of and feed into terms such as legality, smuggling and trafficking. More studies that integrate a critical degree of awareness of the normative assumptions inherent in the regulatory instruments of the state are necessary to be able to understand – rather than to manage and control – migration trajectories.

### **From human trafficking to the sexual economy of mobility**

Before travelling to Cameroon, a staff member at a Dutch NGO gave me a flyer that had been prepared for a prevention campaign against trafficking in Anglophone Cameroon. The flyer read:

- 'Europe a paradise? Don't believe all the stories!'
- 'Did someone promise you a better life by going to Europe? Warning to Women!'
- 'Never give your passport to anyone.'
- 'For many women like you their job is underpaid; often they end up in prostitution.'

The warnings and advice on the flyer come from the assumption that women are subject to exploitation because of the possibility that they will work in prostitution, because they lack information about realities in Europe and because of their relationships with migration brokers. Doubtful about these three sources of vulnerability, I have studied attitudes towards sexuality, courtship and marriage, flows of information, as well as migration brokers.

My study of the sexual economy of mobility and of migration brokers in Cameroon sheds new light onto potentially exploitative migration trajectories of women. My main conclusions on this point are that the human trafficking paradigm is, in parts, based on a European-centric understanding of socio-economic sexual exchanges and that the gender and sexuality of women can also constitute an element of empowerment within migration trajectories. Our enquiry has also taught us that sexual vulnerabilities of aspiring migrant women, vis-à-vis migration brokers, stand in a continuity with courtship practices in countries of departure and that it is, by far, not always migration that creates these vulnerabilities in the first place.

### ***Prostitution and sexuality***

As a consequence of my interest in sex trafficking, I started exploring the emigration trajectories of, at first, only women. Upon embarking for research in Cameroon, I expected to find gender-specific access-paths to emigration. While interactions between aspiring migrants and migration brokers function in gender-specific ways, all migration brokers, with whom I conducted research, offered access to emigration for both men and women. During the entire fieldwork period, I only twice heard through hearsay about brokers who occasionally only sent out women.

In relation to female migration trajectories, I was also expecting the issues of prostitution to be more prominent. Yet, the topic of prostitution barely emerged. Aspiring migrant women engaged with migration brokers and potential husbands abroad in continuity to courtship practices (Tabet 2004) and gendered power dynamics with 'big men' in Cameroon. The case studies of Manuella, Pamella, Delphine, Josephine and Nuretta have shown how, for women in Cameroon, sexuality is well entrenched in everyday life as an instrument of advancement. Pamella, for example, has a law degree, yet, has to survive on sugar daddies. She and other young women have told me repeatedly about requests for sex when hunting for jobs and speaking with potential employers.

Contrary to the discourse of trafficking, which by definition presupposes victimhood, the women at the core of the preceding chapters all actively sought out migration. The only exception may perhaps be Pamella. The emigration attempt that I analysed in the second chapter was the outcome of heavy pressures by her parents. Her prior attempts at emigration, however, were initiated on her own account. And while writing the dissertation, I heard news that Pamella had - through the help of a boyfriend - managed to arrange for a study project in Sierra Leone. Although I do not know about the details of how Pamella was able to leave for an MA programme in another West African country, I find the fact that a boyfriend of hers was involved significant. Courtship and marriage open up a wide array of possibilities for mobility to women.

So-called sexual exploitation can also best be discussed in relation to the sexual economy in societies of departure. Manuella, for example, had been married in her mid-teens by force to a peasant in her village of birth. Through this horizon of expectation, her quest for papers in Switzerland - partly through sex - takes on a different meaning. Manuella looked at sex for papers not as an act of prostitu-

tion, but as a quest for a greater degree of control over the outcome of her life and migration trajectory.

De Haas has pointed out that advancement in migration theory is only possible if we conceptualise migration as an intrinsic part of broader process of social change (de Haas 2010a: 3). In this dissertation, I studied migrant vulnerabilities in relation to the overall life stories of aspiring migrants.

### ***Marriage and courtship***

Debates on trafficking often also include issues of Internet-mediated marriage migration (Wijer & Lap Chew 1999; Chia-Wen Lu 2005; Constable 2005: 63- 90). My research has indeed revealed marriage as one of the few female-specific means of emigration.

For men in Cameroon, marriage to Cameroonian women in bush does not constitute a means of emigration because they are expected to pay bridewealth. The geographical position of men in Cameroon does, in most cases, not enable them to pay bridewealth and the additional travel costs to bush. Hence, it is mostly Cameroonian men in bush that bring over Cameroonian women for marriage. For Cameroonian women, marriage and courtship hence provide an opportunity structure for social and geographical mobility.

Internet-mediated marriage migration is often discussed within the trafficking literature in terms of elements of abuse and lacking agency (Glodava & Onizuka 1994). In Cameroon, however, women who are able to travel out of Cameroon through marriage are mostly - although not exclusively - admired for their new gain in social status (Nyamnjoh & Page 2002). While Internet-mediated marriage migration is furthermore portrayed in the media as occurring between white men and Cameroonian women, I encountered during fieldwork many cases of Internet-mediated marriages between Cameroonian spouses. These marital unions across borders did not only occur between spouses who both came from Cameroon, but, as witnessed in the chapters on marriage and deportation, even from the same village of origin.<sup>4</sup>

At the French consulate, I witnessed how discussions of marriage migration were driven by suspicions of Cameroonian women who were said to be involved in fraud and accused of cold-heartedly pursuing migration at all cost.<sup>5</sup> Internet-mediated marriage migration and marriages with bushfallers or foreigners abroad are, in many ways, in accordance with marriage practices in Cameroon. The ongoing crisis makes it difficult for men in Cameroon to become serious marriage part-

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4 In both Nuretta's and Manuela's cases, village connections were instrumental in enabling them to attempt another departure. Yet, the cases are less reported, probably because they would seem less spectacular for a European audience.

5 Within the discourse on mail order marriages, it is the Asian bride that is said to be the commodified victim of the marital union. Within the discourse on Franco-Cameroonian marriages, by contrast, the French husbands are said to be at risk of being used for the purposes of Cameroonian women. It would be important to conduct further research on why commodification processes are said to function in such different ways within marriage migration in different geographical contexts.



ners. For women, marriage with Cameroonians abroad and foreigners, in general, constitutes a way of achieving conventional expectations attached to married life (Johnson-Hanks 2007).

I found during my fieldwork that sexuality, courtship and marriage were considered assets more often than as sources of vulnerability.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, women can be faced with acute vulnerabilities with respect to courtship and marriage practices. Return programmes in the form of 'rescue' programmes for trafficking 'victims' or actual deportation programmes would do well to consider the sexual economies that returned migrant women face upon return.

### ***Migration brokers and migrant vulnerabilities***

On my very first day at the office of the migration broker Mr. Walter, a woman who went there to get information was sceptical about talking to me. Later on, she told me that she had suspected me of being a migration broker myself. 'There are women who come here to collect girls. They sponsor everything.' She had suspected or at least wondered whether I was that kind of woman. She was willing to invest a lot to be able to fall bush, yet, she was still careful in evaluating which migration broker to trust.

The official view, like the trafficking discourse, connects migration brokerage with the vulnerability of potential migrants. According to these sets of assumptions, it is dangerous to migrate with brokers because they generate profits. Yet, within the moral economy of departure, it is not brokerage itself that creates vulnerabilities. Migration brokers have become central actors because many Cameroonians experience their existence as being closed off from the world. As a consequence, to travel and to migrate implies overcoming closure – which in turn is only possible through connections or migration brokers. Aspiring migrants see migration brokers as enabling people.<sup>7</sup> Without their patronage, access to bush is in most cases not possible.

While trust in migration brokers is strong, it is not unlimited. To understand the limits of trust, one needs to first understand the sources of credibility of migration brokers. Trusting the genuine intentions of migration brokers often depends on speed. Migration brokers that take a long time, have a greater potential to dupe their clients. Migration brokers are furthermore trusted because of their connections to the outside world. The transformative potential of migration brokers and their symbolic importance of being connected to the international level help to explain why families are willing to transfer large sums of money into the hands of migration brokers.

Within the moral economy of departure, the intentions of migration brokers are the most important evaluation criteria for their credibility. A migration broker

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of sexual services as a tool of empowerment and point of negotiation for women even within marital unions, see an example described by Brain (1972: 139).

<sup>7</sup> Family members abroad were also crucial facilitators of emigration, but often cannot bring over aspiring migrants without the help of migration brokers.

can fail with a travel project and still be credible. First, even if migration brokers fail to deliver on their promises, they fail where most others would also have failed, too. Second, we have, indeed, seen in the first and second chapter that the promises of migration brokers to (in the words of Mr. James) 'make globalization a reality' have a worth and value even beyond their actual fulfilment. A broker with enough credits, that is past achievements, can afford temporary failure because they are believed to be powerful due to their connections to state actors or international figures. Any connection to bush has worth and value. This is why giving money to a migration broker makes sense even if there is the possibility of being duped or the 'programme' of the broker failing. At minimum, the transferred money constitutes an investment into a patronage relationship and establishes a connection.

In my analysis, I made it clear that migration brokers are expected to deliver the means, but not necessarily the ends of migration. This is not dissimilar from consulate offices that charge visa fees and request multiple forms of documentation and certificates regardless of whether or not a visa is in the end delivered. In chapter three, I also demonstrated how visa fees are sources of revenue for consulate officers. While state authorities construct the work of migration brokers in terms of commerce, embassies also collect money. Hence, aspiring migrants do not always make boundaries between state and non-state mediation processes and, at times, talk about 'buying visas'.

While travelling via migration brokers is said to be dangerous because of their high failure rates, positive outcome of visa applications with embassies are far from certain either. Many aspiring migrants who approach migration brokers had prior to this failed with their visa application at embassies. It was striking in my research how potential migrants felt acutely vulnerable in their relationship with consulate officers. Informants told me about the money they had lost in applying for visas with embassies as much as they told me about migration brokers who had duped them.

Many of my informants experienced visa application processes in terms of luck. In doing so, they foregrounded the volatile nature of the interpretation and application of legal frameworks. The analysis of consulate offices has revealed how decision-making processes on visa applications are contingent and mediated through technologies, such as paper, interviews and literal technologies. Our enquiry has also taught us how remote regulatory requirements at embassies are from the realities lived by aspiring migrants. Mediation is hence both an integral part of how consulate offices operate, as well as needed by aspiring migrants - regardless of whether their migration trajectories are likely to be classified by state officials as 'illegal' or 'legal'.

Locally grounded terminology - as for example the one of feymen, dokimen and big men - sheds new light onto migration trajectories that in countries of arrival might otherwise be framed as smuggling or trafficking. Migration brokers who lack the intention to actually send people out are called feymen. Migration brokers who only imitate travel documents are called dokimen. Migration brokers who are able to send out their clients because of their connections are considered big men. The latter are the type of migration broker aspiring migrants hopes to

encounter. The danger of giving money to migration brokers consists in mistaking a feyman or a dokiman for a big man.

While anti-trafficking campaigns might warn women against giving away their passports, migration brokers were often actually the ones to have produced and given these passports to aspiring migrants in the first place. In this study it has also been shown how migration brokers, at times, know as little about working conditions in countries of arrival as their clients know. I will, in the below discussion of the moral economy of departure, further explore the circulation and evaluation of the stories and promises of bush.

### **From bushfalling at all cost to the moral economy of departure**

To be able to explain what makes young Cameroonians want to migrate at all cost, I studied the ‘moral economy of departure.’ With this notion, I refer to the production and circulation of values, emotions and norms as they are evoked by the event of departure (Fassin 2009: 1257). Only an intimate understanding of how the costs of migration are understood and experienced in Cameroon can help us uncover the rationality that leads people in Cameroon to choose for bush at all cost. I will focus in particular on evaluations of costs and gains, flows and interpretations of information, as well as on the place of the law within conditions of departure.

#### ***The costs and gains of migration***

To explain people’s willingness to make high investments and sacrifices for the sake of being able to fall bush, it is crucial to take seriously the values and norms of a society of departure. In my examination of how the costs and gains of bush are experienced by (aspiring) migrants and their families, I suggest that bush as an asset has generated new value scales.

First, the costs of migration have to be seen from the perspective of people in places of departure. While some of the stories of my informants are appalling, in a Cameroonian perspective, emigration figures largely in terms of success stories. To Delphine, for example, the interviews of undocumented migrant women in Europe she transcribed did not elicit discouragement about the potential of bushfalling. Clearly, she had different interpretations of what constituted a migration failure.

When I expressed my concerns about the dangers incurred by undocumented informants and their struggles without papers, Delphine would instead admire them for being abroad and for being able to send 30 or 50 Euros every few months, or an occasional 300 or 400 Euros in the case of a funeral. The marker of illegality did not for her mean that she would evaluate a trajectory as a failure. Regardless

of whether or not a bushfaller has a work permit or a residence permit, his or her migration trajectory can elevate the social status of a family back in Cameroon.

Leaving for bush at all cost is considered an access route to success in a context in which everyday life has come to be defined by a routinised state of crisis (Roitman & Mbembe 1995). While not everyone is certain to succeed in leaving the country and making it, the difficulties of the everyday in Cameroon are certain. Given that immobility constitutes the baseline uncertainty of every day life, migration, despite its uncertainties, is seen as an opportunity. If migration involves sacrifices and investments, then those sacrifices and investments need to be compared to the chances for success and failure available in the context in which aspiring migrants make their choices.

Many bushfallers have to delay their return or visit to Cameroon because they have not been able to generate enough money to be able to live up to the financial expectations by their families in Cameroon. While an individual migrant has to make sacrifices in trying to live up to the demands of bush, these sacrifices are legitimate and desirable from the perspective that it aids to the well-being of the family.

Second, the gains of bushfalling have to be viewed within the context of the dynamics in the place of departure. Access to bush by even just one family member can signify a source of protection from other risks and costs of life. I have demonstrated in chapter two how financial investments into bushfalling are considered in terms of 'surviving the others'. Pamella's parents justified the investment of an entire pension scheme into the bushfalling project of one family member because they considered that bushfalling – like no other investment project – held the potential to generate future gains that could ensure the education and future projects of other family members. Bushfalling has become an attempt for Cameroonians to access greater social security.

Bushfalling at all cost is also considered profitable because of the assets that access to bush can generate. People like to go to bush at all cost because bush has come to define success itself. Bushfallers can generate further connections and openings that can enable others to migrate, as well. Bush is not only an important source of money supply, but also a source of value beyond actual presence in bush. In the chapter on deportation, we witnessed how Manuella was able to draw on her connections for social status despite her deportation.

Bush has become a standard against which the value of things is evaluated. Goods from abroad (even second hand) as well as money from abroad have a different value because they have been sent from abroad. Bush money, for example, is spent differently to money that has been earned in the country. Its value is not measured against the time or effort it would take to generate this money in Cameroon. When Delphine received money from a former boyfriend of hers in bush, for example, she shared some of the money with me and we went on a festive outing for clothes shopping. Under other circumstances, Delphine would not have had the social status or financial power to grant me such a gift.

It was striking how bush, as an asset, also transforms family configurations (Piot 2010). As I have analysed in the chapter on marriage migration, bridewealth payments can be replaced by the respective husband's presence in bush. I also ana-

lysed how Delphine, upon arrival in bush, was clear about accepting to marry a Cameroonian man in bush only if he would agree to bring over a member of her family. Delphine was thinking about her social and geographical location as an asset. If she was already in bush and her potential husband no longer needed to bring her to bush, then her family network needed to gain in another way. Instead of bringing over herself, Delphine wanted her potential husband to pay for the journey of one of her family members. Family and marriage obligations are transformed through the value system of bush. Bush figures strongly in matrimonial strategies. Instead of paying bridewealth, Delphine's future husband would have to engage with a migration broker to bring a younger sibling of hers to bush.

The value of international telephone numbers and international phone calls taught me how bushfallers are implicit in the production of bush as a highly valuable because scarce asset. For many young Cameroonians, it is a source of pride and status to have a bush number on their telephone. To protect themselves from unwanted social pressures, bushfallers, by contrast, often chose to control access to their international telephone numbers. The control of bushfallers over their telephone numbers contributes to the value of international telephone numbers as signs of social status and sources of social security. International phone numbers are traded and protected as scarce goods to which access has to be regulated. The sense of bush as a source of assets is hence in part maintained by the regulation of bushfallers themselves.

The value system that has been generated by people's conceptions of access to bush is one of the key factors that makes young Cameroonians want fall bush at all cost. Two other explanatory factors have emerged in the above discussion. First, the potential costs of bushfalling are lower if the meaning of a failed investment is contextualised within the routinised state of crisis in Cameroon today. Second, the uncertainty of investments into bushfalling are also lower if measured against the potential gains of bushfalling as experienced and understood by family members in Cameroon.

### ***From uninformed choices to the economy of migratory knowledge***

We saw in the introduction of this study how the research on bushfalling did not discourage Delphine to fall bush herself. I found it remarkable that during fieldwork, Delphine did not investigate the scholarship institutions and programmes that I had passed on. She was not the only one to handle information I offered in unexpected ways. The secretariat at the INACOD office continued to believe that the poster with the skyscrapers behind her desk was Paris. Mr. James and Mr. Walter also valued me more for the contacts and added prestige that I generated than for the information that I could have provided.

My research showed that Delphine and other acquaintances did not take seriously the authority of the information that I could pass onto them about procedures of immigration and realities in countries of destination. Flows of information and its interpretations are crucial in explaining people's resilience in continuing to believe and pursue success in bush at all cost. With the economy of migration knowl-

edge, I refer to cultural and societal factors that structure the flow of information and influence the construction of meaning. They chose not to take heed to information I offered because their location and experience had taught them to think of access paths and hurdles to emigration in terms that rendered my information largely irrelevant.

Within the many months of fieldwork, information on legal frameworks or procedures was hardly ever a point of discussion. Instead, access to bush was figured in terms of openings, lines and connections. If access to bush is realized through connections, information on immigration procedures has no value for potential bushfallers. For my informants, speed, power and connections were important in seeking access to bush. The information I might have been able to provide was neither trustworthy nor pertinent also because many aspiring migrants stand a small chance of being granted a visa at an embassy.

When Delphine became a bushfaller – that is, when she was in Sweden – I was struck by how her attitudes towards bush at all cost were changing. Over the phone, she talked to her friends for the first time about the difficulties of living and working ‘illegally’ in Europe. Delphine knew, however, that she had only a small chance of being taken seriously. Her new position in bush meant that she was no longer a trustworthy source of information on bush. Successful bushfallers might want to prevent the success of others and thus spread information that is not to be trusted. Those Cameroonians still hoping to travel out of Cameroon consider the complaints and stories from bushfallers about the difficult realities in bush as mere signs of wickedness.

Jealousy, fear of witchcraft and the consequent imperative for secrecy can help to explain high degrees of optimism among young Cameroonians of certain classes about the potential of bush. Aspiring migrants have to fear the jealousy of people in Cameroon who might want to prevent their travel projects. Jealous acquaintances can engage in witchcraft to prevent the success of others. Failure of travel projects is often explained through and blamed on witchcraft.

Fears of jealousy, witchcraft and failure mean that aspiring bushfallers must keep their travel projects secret when trying to leave the country. In the introduction, I analysed how selective the circle of people can be that is allowed to know about a departure project. It is secrecy that protects aspiring migrants from the jealousy of others and thus from witchcraft. Within the moral economy of departure in Cameroon, it is not information, but secrecy that renders migration safe.

Through this imperative for secrecy, information about access routes and possible hurdles circulate only in very restricted ways. Even when information circulates, it is not always trusted or considered to be relevant. People who return after a temporary stay abroad often find that others do not believe their migration stories. The more privileged social classes of Cameroonians are not credible when they return from a visit because they have the opportunity to be granted another visa in the future. They have no reason to overstay a visa. Less privileged Cameroonians who voluntarily return before the expiry date of their visa are suspected of not being serious or judged for being foolish, egoistic and irresponsible. They are not sure to be granted a visa again in the future.

Many Europeans think that West Africans want to migrate because they lack information and idealise life in Europe. We have seen in the preceding chapter that migration choices and emigration strategies are developed under circumstances more complex than having or not having information. In Cameroon, the desire to fall bush at all cost is largely considered to be a sign of ambition and determination to be successful in life. One should ask, not what people know or do not know before departure, but how they come to trust and interpret information that they do have.

In the light of the above insights, the deployment of ever-greater financial resources into prevention and sensibilisation campaigns that try to convince aspiring migrants to stay at home is bound to fail. If information campaigns do not offer real avenues for migration, the information provided is most likely to be taken as either untrustworthy (because aimed at preventing the success of others) or irrelevant (because it refers to access paths to bush unavailable to many).

### ***Migration failures and the place of the law***

Delphine's changing discourse on bush at all cost demonstrates another important point. Why did she only begin to think about legal frameworks as hurdles to successful bushfalling once she had herself spent some time in bush?

People's firm beliefs in bush at all cost can be better explained against the backdrop of how the causes of failure are understood in Cameroon. Legal beliefs carried by migration policy position illegality as a key aspect of the failure of migration trajectories. Yet, during fieldwork I have encountered very different explanations for migration failure.

Within the moral economy of departure in Cameroon, failure can be caused by laziness or selfishness. If bushfallers in Europe do not remain in close contact with their family members in Cameroon after arrival in Europe, families experience this rupture and (often financial) disappointment in terms of 'being forgotten'. It is lazy or otherwise immoral bushfallers who forget their family members in Cameroon. Through this terminology, the migration failure is blamed on the migrant. He or she is too lazy to work or too selfish to maintain family connections. The possible undocumented status of some bushfallers is only one among other obstacles to success.

Local perceptions of migration in Cameroon can unravel beliefs about the functioning of the law. For policy makers, undocumented migrant's failures are caused by illegality. Whether or not undocumented migrants work hard, or how they choose to use the money are only secondary considerations. Yet, selfishness and laziness have real explanatory power for family members in Cameroon. They know that many bushfallers without papers were able to have success in the end. Manuella's travel companion (see chapter on deportation), for example, was able to earn enough money to arrange for a paper wedding with a Nigerian man with documents and now has her own residence permit in Switzerland. She made it and this proves to family members in Cameroon that illegality is not a reason for failure.

From the above considerations, we can conclude that legal frameworks on migration control are not as omni-present and all-pervasive as the spectacle of border control tries to make the European public opinion believe.<sup>8</sup> The individual dispositions of a migrant, as well as other entirely contingent factors within a migration trajectory, can be as important or more important than the structural precondition of illegality. In the chapter on deportation I concluded, for example, by pointing out how illegality is an underlying precondition, but not an automatic cause of deportation. Whether or not the condition of illegality leads to deportation hinges on contingent factors, for instance, the gendered nature of the work place. This is reflected by my research finding that deportation is talked about in Cameroon in terms of bad luck, bad behaviour and laziness. Within the moral economy of deportation in Cameroon, these three factors - but not illegality - cause deportation. As a consequence, high deportation rates do nothing to lower people's enthusiasm about the possibilities of migration. Success in migration is a question of working hard and trying one's luck.

My research findings have led me to reconsider both the beliefs that feed into and come out of migration policy, but also the very questions that are asked. The idea that deportation could or should discourage further migration decisions is based on the belief that illegality automatically causes deportation. Following Law and Society scholars, I refer to a set of beliefs about the functioning of the law as a type of legal consciousness. Legal consciousness studies have tended to examine more the consciousness of people exposed to the workings of the law, than those who are said to be its professionals. Yet, as I have demonstrated above, through an empirical study of the place of the law and its experience, underlying sets of beliefs that policy makers hold about the law can be made explicit, too.

Much can be gained by analysing the belief systems of both policy makers and migrants. The challenge of such an endeavour is two-fold. First, there is the challenge of how to relate the legal consciousness of policy makers with the legal consciousness of migrants. It would be too easy to take the legal consciousness of policy makers as rational and legitimate and the legal consciousness of migrants as irrational and illegitimate. This is why I have analysed how the legitimacy, rationality and moral superiority of state authority is constructed through accusations of fraud, selfishness, commerce and criminality.

Second, there is the challenge of not essentialising difference or creating unwarranted dichotomies. In my study, I noted how from the perspective of departure, the failure of migration trajectories with or without migration brokers looked very alike. I was struck during my fieldwork period how legal frameworks did not figure in the explanations of whether or not brokers were able to send people out of the country or not.

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<sup>8</sup> Illegality is a qualification that at points of departure has not necessarily yet been determined. While demarcations of migration trajectories as illegal get enacted by state officials during the course of a migration trajectory, people in Europe nevertheless always asked me whether I was working with legal or illegal migration brokers. To think in terms of whether or not residence permits are likely or not in the future to get demarcated by state officials as legal or illegal and to then qualify these documents essentially in these same terms is in my view to think and see like the state (Scott 1998).



Another research finding was that aspiring migrants evaluated travel permits given by their brokers not in terms of their potential future classification as legal or illegal, but according to their efficiency. From the perspective of departure, what mattered was the capacity and power of papers to make people travel. This study has further also illustrated how Delphine – because she was able to travel – shifted her position on migration failure and the place of the law after her arrival in Sweden. As soon as Delphine's geographical position changed, her reading of access paths and hurdles to migration changed, too.

I hence conclude that the above evaluations of the quality of paper in terms of efficiency ought not to be constructed as a Cameroonian legal consciousness. The above-described set of assumptions and beliefs by aspiring migrants about the place of the law is not one that is specific to Cameroonians, but one that is specific to the context of departure. Beliefs about luck, laziness, selfishness and bad behaviour correspond to the experience of imposed immobility at the geographical and temporal position of departure. It is above all mobility that brought Delphine closer to the beliefs of policy makers who foreground the automatic, rational and legitimate nature of law.

### **The governance of migration and the distribution of social risks**

Policy debates on human trafficking often seek to establish typologies of potential 'trafficking victims' and 'traffickers'. Attention is directed to the socio-psychological factors that render an aspiring migrant potentially 'victim' to exploitative labour migration. Through this focus on types of people who can become 'victims' and types of people that could become 'traffickers', the legal and economic context in which aspiring migrants relate to migration brokers in their quest for mobility gets obscured.

This project has instead asked why there is a demand for migration brokers and how aspiring migrants relate to migration brokers, as well as to other regulatory authorities. I studied emigration desires and decisions in relation to actors (such as migration brokers, consulate officers and family members) and in relation to less intentional and more structural constraints and difficulties (such as legal frameworks, moralities and debts). It is insufficient to merely look at the individual level. The phenomenon of bushfalling and trafficking do not exist merely because individuals and their members of family chose to migrate at all cost. It is important to also study the production and distribution of costs.

Economic, political and legal constraints impose choices on aspiring migrants and thus produce the costs of migration. Labour migration occurs – as this study has demonstrated – within the interstices of expectations, pressures and regulations of the states, families and market forces. Receiving states, sending states,

family networks (often transnational ones) and individual migrants can have very different expectations of migrants. All three will evaluate in different ways what constitutes an acceptable risk and a legitimate care need.<sup>9</sup>

Delphine did not just want to migrate at all cost because she was ill informed – let alone simply desperate. Ultimately, she wanted to fall bush at all cost because she saw travelling as an avenue for social mobility and a means to take care of herself and her family. The original question as to what makes young Cameroonians want to migrate at all cost might be re-formulated on the basis of my research. A new question may ask why social risks and care needs are distributed at a global level in ways that provide incentives for exploitative labour migration.<sup>10</sup>

The dynamics that make people migrate at all cost can only be structurally changed if, through the governance of migration and development, we seek more equitable distributions of social risks between individuals, families and states. Similarly it remains vital to stir public debate about what people in countries of arrival do *not* know about, as well as about how they wish to interpret the realities of aspiring migrants in countries of departure. This book is an attempt in that direction.

By researching what makes young Cameroonian migrate at all cost, my study has unravelled how migration law and policy is based on normative assumptions about money, paper and marriage. By studying rather than presupposing the place of the law in conditions of departure, I suggest we will be able to come to understand why migration is connected with high costs for some and not for others.

In writing this book, I have tried to show how close attention to the moral economy of departure and the plurality of regulatory authorities that direct potential migrants can surpass simplistic analysis of migration in terms of legal versus illegal, as some sort of fixed opposition. With a greater awareness of the plurality of controls and the conflicting norms involved, a study of the governance of migration becomes possible that is attentive to the state as a regulatory authority, but does not take for granted its supposed moral and spatial superiority.

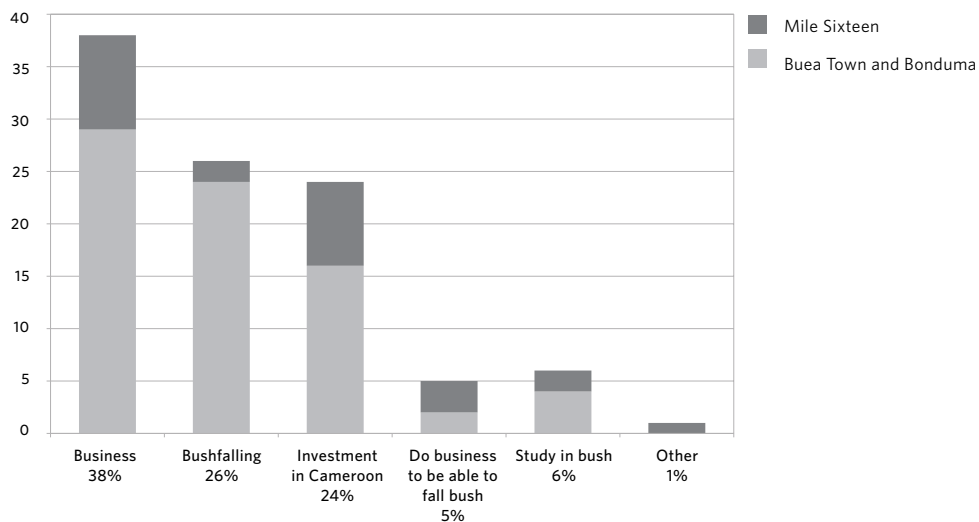
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9 While migration is in Europe predominantly framed in terms of risks, for example, it was more considered as a life-changing opportunity and great fortune in Cameroon. With a migratory risk, I refer here to uncertain and negative outcomes of migration.

10 While the defence of the welfare state against fraud is these days at the core of a restrictive immigration discourse (Spire 2008: 52), migrants have built up safety mechanisms beyond government-sponsored insurance systems and reciprocal family networks. These migrant strategies to secure life trajectories and meet care needs of families in countries of origin are enabled and limited by national and global regulatory structures.

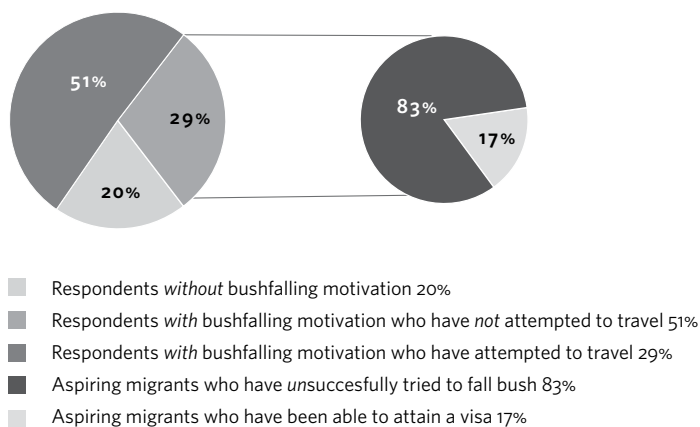
## Annexes

**Graph 1: If you were to receive 2,5 million CFA what would you do with the money?**



Source: quantitative survey conducted in May 2008 amongst 100 respondents in different neighbourhoods in Buea, South West Cameroon .

**Graph 2: Wanting to and trying to fall bush**



Source: quantitative survey conducted in May 2008 amongst 100 respondents in different neighbourhoods in Buea, South West Cameroon

**Table 1: Trying to fall bush**

Respondents who did not hold a passport:	66%
Respondents who held a passport: Amongst passport holders, 11 respondents had not applied for a visa with an embassy Amongst passport holder, 18 respondents had unsuccessfully applied for a visa with an embassy Amongst passport holders, 5 respondents had been granted a visa	34%
Total	100%

*Source:* quantitative survey conducted in May 2008 amongst 100 respondents in different neighbourhoods in Buea, South West Cameroon

#### **Annexe 1: Methodology of quantitative Survey**

My research assistant and I carried out 30 questionnaires in Miles 16, 30 questionnaires in Bonduma and 40 questionnaires in Buea Town. The random sample was collected on a selected road in each of these three quarters. Miles 16 is a more suburban settlement at the outskirts of Buea with a low level of education amongst its population and a high rate of farmers. Bonduma is situated between the student area of Molyko and the old town of Buea Town and is where I was living myself throughout fieldwork. In Bonduma, we carried out surveys with immediate neighbours of mine, store keepers and other workers further up my road. Buea Town used to be the centre of Buea. We carried out the survey in both the quarter of Buea Town where the Bakweri live, as well as in the immigrant quarter behind the market.

Whenever possible, respondents filled in the questionnaires themselves. So as to avoid confusion, however, we often resorted to reading out and explaining the different questions to our respondents. So as to ensure the trust and confidence of respondents, the survey in Mile Sixteen was carried out by Delphine herself. In Buea Town, I worked together with another research assistant who had conducted prior surveys for an NGO in the quarter.

## Annexe 2: Questionnaire of the quantitative survey

### a) Profile of the respondent

Geographic location:

- ☐ Miles 16
- ☐ Bonduma
- ☐ Buea Town

Gender:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Age range:
- ☐ 10- 20
- ☐ 21- 30
- ☐ 31- 40
- ☐ 41- 50
- ☐ 50 and above

Ethnic group:

Name of ethnic group (please write): .....

Please tick:

- ☐ nw province
- ☐ sw province
- ☐ Other (please specify): .....

Marital status:

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Come-we-stay
- ☐ Widowed

Number of children: .....

Educational level:

- ☐ primary (class 1- 6)
- ☐ post-primary
- ☐ secondary (form 1- 4/5, GCE and Cap)
- ☐ high school (lower and upper sixth, A-level)
- ☐ university

Professional activity:

- ☐ Farming
- ☐ Business
- ☐ civil servants
- ☐ unemployed
- ☐ others (please specify): .....

**b) General perceptions of migration:**

What do you understand by 'bushfalling'? (Please explain briefly)

.....

.....

.....

What do you understand by 'bush'? (Please explain briefly)

.....

.....

.....

**c) Motivation to fall bush:**

Have you been to bush? (please circle) Yes/No

If yes, where? .....

.....

.....

Would you like to fall bush? (please circle) Yes/ No

If yes, where? .....

Have you tried to fall bush? (Please circle) Yes/No

· Do you have a passport?

Yes/No

· Have you ever gone to an Embassy to get a visa?

Yes/No

· Have you ever gone to any place or person that helps people to fall bush? Yes/No

· Have you ever paid money to any place or person without being able to go? Yes/No

· Would you borrow money to travel?

Yes/No

If you were to receive 2,5 million CFA what would you do with the money?

- ☐ Bushfalling
- ☐ Business
- ☐ other

d) **Family:**

Do you have a brother/sister/cousin or child in bush? (Please circle) Yes/  
No

If yes, please circle: Male/Female

If yes, Where? .....

Has anybody in your family ever tried to fall bush? (Please circle) Yes/No

- Do you have a brother/ sister/ cousin or child that has already gone to the embassy to get a visa? Yes/No
- Do you have a brother/ sister/ cousin or child that has spent money on bushfalling without being able to go? Yes/No
- Have you or your brother/sister/ cousin/ child/ parents ever borrowed money to travel? Yes/ No
- Do you have a brother/ sister/ cousin or child that has been to bush and who has come back? Yes/no
- If yes, did he/she return voluntarily? Yes/No
- If no, was he/she repatriated? Yes/No

### Annexe 3: Lexicon and abbreviations

Ajebotar	Ajebotar is a Pidgin term from Nigeria that has travelled to Cameroon via popular soap operas on Nigerian T.V. channels like 'African Magic'. The term refers to a lifestyle that only members of the upper-middle class in West Africa can afford.
Bush	<p>Respondents in the survey gave the below definitions of bush:</p> <p>'White man kontri'</p> <p>'All European and American countries'</p> <p>'Non-African countries'</p> <p>'Out of Cameroon, even Nigeria, because you can go there and things become better'</p> <p>'Even Equatorial Guinea can be considered bush because people make money there and it is better than Cameroon.'</p> <p>'It can be anywhere, even in Africa, because there are some African countries that are better than Cameroon, where you can go and make your life.'</p> <p>'Any country better than yours'</p> <p>'Bush is the developed country'</p> <p>'Bush is any country where people go to in search of greener pastures or to acquire skills (knowledge)'</p> <p>'Bush means a place where people go to help and develop themselves and their family'</p> <p>'Bush is anywhere fruitful where success is obtained'</p> <p>'The place you go for a better future'</p> <p>'Where there might be ample of opportunity, a place of plenty'</p> <p>'It is a place that you can achieve something after hard work'</p> <p>'Bush is a place where you can survive'</p>
Bushfalling	<p>In my survey, I asked respondents to explain what they meant with bushfalling:</p> <p>'It is to go abroad and hustle to send money to your family and also to better your life.'</p> <p>'To go to white man kontri'</p> <p>'To go work money in white man kontri'</p> <p>'To go abroad in search of greener pastures'</p> <p>'To travel overseas in search of jobs to come and better your family condition'</p>



Bushfalling (continued)	<p>‘To go and fight for your future abroad’ ‘Wash clothes, take care of their grandchildren, work and send money home’ ‘People from mostly less developed countries travel to the developed countries for greener pastures’ ‘Going to a place out of your country where you can make quick or fast money’</p> <p>‘Because of poverty find money there and then come back here’</p> <p>‘People leaving their country and going anywhere where they will be able to help their family in one or two things’ ‘Ability to travel out of the country to search for money’</p> <p>‘Bushfalling means going out due to hardship and no job after your education to help your parents, too, so that their lives will be better since the country of the white man has jobs and money’</p> <p>‘To leave your country to another country for adventure’</p> <p>‘It is an ideology developed by most Africans and Cameroonians especially about leaving home for foreign lands’</p>
Cam no go	‘Com no go’ is a Pidgin term for ‘immigrants’. It refers to people from the North West Province that now live in the South West Province.
To chop moni	Literally: to eat money; figuratively: to steal, waste, enjoy and/or misuse money
Cyber massa	Husbands that are found through the internet. Massa is derived from ‘master’ and refers generally to men and husbands.
To dash moni	To give away money as a gift to someone else (mostly from a person of greater status to a person of lesser status)
Dokimen	People involved in the production of (travel) documents
D. V.	Every year, the U.S. gives out 50.000 immigrant visas because of a so-called ‘Diversity Immigrant Visa Programme’. There is a fixed quote of ‘diversity visas’ for each country depending on whether this country has a low rate of immigration to the U.S. or not. The winners of the lottery have to fulfill minimal eligibility requirements with respect to their educational level and their work experience.
Feymen	Con artists, trick businessmen

To follow a line	To follow a line means to pursue a goal and/or pass through somebody to achieve something beneficial, like for example bushfalling'. To follow a line can hence refer to: 'following up documents to fall bush' generally 'struggling to fall bush' but also 'dating a boyfriend'
To go the lie lie way	To fall bush through tricks
To go panja	To go to Equatorial Guinea (where people speak Spanish) and then pretend to be in Spain
To hustle	Respondents in the survey gave the below definitions of hustling: 'Working as hard as possible' 'Struggling abroad to make ends meet' 'Fighting to make ends meet at all cost possible' 'Doing so many kinds of work just to look for money.' 'Doing business' 'Working many kinds of jobs' 'Working different things to achieve what you want'
Kojo	Kojo is an abbreviation for 'kojokojo' which refers to a very close friend
Mamie Waka	Both a woman who walks/travels a lot, as well as under certain circumstances a woman of 'light morality' (also used to allude to women in prostitution)
Mboma	Literally speaking, mboma means python. Figuratively, the term mboma refers to rich married men that date younger women.
Money talks	People who have money to spend are in command and able to do many things.
Ngambe man	Fortune teller with mystical powers, diviner
Njangi group	A njangi group is a communal savings group that meets at regular intervals.

Njumboss	This new slang term is an assemblage of njumba (boyfriend) and boss (big man). Some define njumboss as 'white old man' or 'sugar daddy'. The term njumboss can also refer itself to the girls themselves who aspire to a life of luxury – whatever the means necessary to get there.
Nyongo	Victims of this form of witchcraft have to work as zombies to make money.
Opening	A possibility to fall bush
To see money	Cameroonians often stress that they do not 'see money' for the work they do in Cameroon. To 'see money' means to see the fruits of your labour and to earn a quantity of money that allows certain needs to be met.
Should in case	An supplementary boyfriend for additional needs
Sugar daddy	Older boyfriend who financially helps younger girlfriends
Umugwo	This is a Nigerian term that refers to the time after giving birth where the grandmother of the new born baby stays with the young mother.
Thief lass run	Male bushfallers that on a visit to Cameroon promise marriage to women in Cameroon, but then disappear after their departure for bush.
To work money	Not to work the soil, but to work to earn money

**Annexe 4: Transcription of the song 'Njomboss@yahoo.fr' by Erico**

**Refrain 1:** La vie au village est difficile mamie  
Je vais en ville pour chercher la vie  
Douala e fine sote  
Je vais surfer sur le net et trouver mon blanc mamie  
Même s'il a le serpent

Na so e dey  
Douala e fine sote  
But na house dear

*Refrain 1*

**Refrain 2 :** Quand j'ai planté macabo, ça pas donné  
J'ai même planté igname, ça pas donné  
Moi je plante tomato, ça pas donné  
Moi planté comme poteau à Douala et ça donne  
Oh oh oh Njomboss@yahoo.fr

J'enverrai mes photos où je suis toute nue  
Et même si elles sont diffusées partout  
Na me I find am - oh  
Je mangerai le marigot d'autres  
Et même s'il me demande de payer  
Na me I find am - oh

*Refrain 2*

Oh oh oh Njomboss@yahoo.fr  
*[Translated from the language Douala:]*  
The night work has paid me  
Because of the life that I have chosen  
If you don't have money, don't come near me (2x)  
Don't come near me (2x)  
Stay where you are, don't come near me  
Stay there (2x)

**Refrain 3:** You should look at me with that name njomboss  
It is just a name  
You should look at me  
L'argent c'est bon  
Look at me (2x)

Don't think you can make me lose what I have found  
You should see my money  
Stand up and dance, dance, dance

*Refrain 3*

## Annexe 5: Advertisement posters of migration brokers

### **INACOD – CAMEROON**

*Good news – Good news – Good news*  
International Work Study Programme 2008- 09

#### **Our Services :**

- Admission and Scholarships into foreign Universities
- Foreign Jobs
- Students Orientation and Career Counselling
- Informaiton about opportunities
- Travelling assistance

### **Bush Falling Bush Falling**

#### **EMPOWERING YOUR FUTURE CAREER**

#### *Global Tour and Career Programmes*

We organise a monthly global massive tour and other career programmes to places and institutions around the world with more than 20 people. Spaces are always limited to make up the team. You could be part of the team. It may cost you just 150.000 CFA for your visa to be handy. Departure date is a month from the day of registration.

For more details, contacts: xxx  
What if you prefer anywhere around the world?

#### **Travel Around the Globe**

**Departure: 1 month from registration date**

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## Summary

“If you were to receive 2.5 million CFA, what would you do with the money?”<sup>1</sup> People on the radio were hotly discussing the radio announcer’s jackpot question. Using the money for migration figured highly among the responses. Indeed, when my research assistant and I questioned 100 respondents in different neighbourhoods of Buea (South West Province, Cameroon), almost 40 percent of all respondents wanted to use the money to travel abroad. Yet, the gap between desire and capacity to travel abroad is vast. Of all respondents 80 percent would have liked to travel, but only five percent of all respondents had ever been to the West.

In the face of ever-increasing difficulties to obtain papers and considerable economic costs of travelling, the desire of young Cameroonians to emigrate is unrelenting. So much so that even after an informant was deported, my research assistant, Delphine denied any possible downsides or negative side effect of leaving the country without papers. In the midst of diligently transcribing interviews of undocumented migrant women in Europe about their everyday struggle to survive in Europe, Delphine would jump up and proclaim: “*Je veux go a tout prix!*”<sup>2</sup> She confidently told me that she was going to go – at any cost and in any way. If others had been unlucky, she would work hard on getting it right. She was going to have success and travelling was the only means to do so!

This study seeks to explain what makes young Cameroonians pursue migration at all cost. It was written both in reaction to strong motivations for migration in Cameroon and to the trafficking debates in Europe. The free flow of capital and commodities is often celebrated, while the free circulation of people is often seen as a problem (Malkki 2002: 352; Kearney 1986; Carling 2002: 5). My study takes the paradoxes between mobility and closure as its starting point. In view of young Cameroonians like Delphine, I studied attitudes regarding the costs of migration, flows of information and understandings of success and failure.

Anglophone Cameroonians began to refer to migration through the Pidgin word of *bushfalling* only since the late 1990s, Bushfalling is the act of going out to the wilderness (i.e. the bush) to hunt down meat (i.e. money) and bring home the trophies. Emigration is currently envisaged in Anglophone Cameroon under the term of bushfalling. The phenomenon of bushfalling serves me here as a key entry

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1 Original: “If man for dash you 2.5 million, you for do weti with am?”

2 ‘Paris at all cost’ is the title of a recent Cameroonian film on the perils of emigration. The film talks about prostitution, money swindlers, failure and deportation. As Delphine was referring herself to this film from Francophone Cameroon, she mixed the title of the film ‘at all cost’ with both Pidgin and French. One needs to understand that the language situation in Cameroon is quite complex. The German colony Kamerun was divided between France and the U.K. during the First World War; in 1961 both parts were reunited in the Federal Republic Cameroon, but the country is still divided in Anglophone and Francophone areas. In the Anglophone part, people mostly speak Pidgin rather than English.

point to study the vulnerability of migrants in a framework that is informed by people's perspectives in a place of emigration.<sup>3</sup>

It has been the contention of this study that attitudes towards potentially risky migration trajectories can only be understood from the perspective of aspiring migrants in a place of departure. In this sense, I tried to balance the trend in much of the literature that writes from the perspective of values and norms in societies of arrival. Thus, this study ethnographically illuminates different spaces (i.e. migration broker offices, embassies, airports) and moments (i.e. monetary transfers, departures, returns) of migration as they manifest themselves in Cameroon. I discuss relations between brokers and clients; the emergence of migration brokers and their relations to instances of state authority; dynamics during visa interviews at Embassies; diverging quests for security in the case of marriage-related migration attempts; and perceptions and experiences of deportation. By exploring the meaning and importance of notions such as *openings*, *lines*, *connections* and *luck*, I contribute insights into academic debates on migration, illegality and security.

I was confronted with the issue of migration through (both practical and academic) work on human trafficking. The paradigm of human trafficking very often limits migrant women to the role of victims. While films and Internet may portray unrealistic images of life in Europe, I argue in this book that the paradigm of trafficking has equally given birth to unfounded images of why and how young women in West Africa seek emigration. The focus on abuse and forms of exploitation in countries of arrival often overshadows the choices, motivations and difficulties of aspiring migrants before they set upon their journey. The purpose of this book is to develop an alternative view on migration that focuses more on the choices and struggles of aspiring migrants when still in their country of departure.

Rather than taking at face value legal distinctions between 'human trafficking' and 'human smuggling', 'formal' and 'informal' migration, I follow De Genova (2002) and Torpey (1998) who suggest that notions like legality and illegality need to be problematized. To do so the historical and political construction of these notions need to be studied prior to analyzing how terms, such as 'legal' and 'trafficked', are used to label people, activities or trajectories. In this way, the results of this research project speak to concerns within trafficking debates without being driven by the parameters of its legal and administrative definitions (Malkki 1995b: 505).

Taking the governance of migration as the main focus of my work, I ethnographically look at the ways in which migration is regulated by migration brokers, state officials and family members. I use the notion of multiple regulatory authorities (Roitman 2005) as a means to challenge the limiting idea – more or less implicit in so many studies of migration – that the state is the main or only authority involved. By encompassing market, state and family players, the theoretical approach of this study goes beyond the analysis of structuralist scholars that place migration in world systems and focus on market and economic disparities (Sassen

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3 I follow Wong's call to analyse trafficking trajectories on the basis of the conditions under which migration projects are undertaken (2005: 87).



1988; Massey et al 1993: 444). It also goes beyond network approaches that mainly look at migration through the agency of family, kinship and social capital (Levitt 2007; Glick Schiller 1992; Nyberg Sorensen & Fog Olwig 2001).

When looking beyond the state's apparent monopoly for legitimate control of mobility, one can recognise how state authority is implicated in the production of fraud. While state actors stage border controls also as a means to be seen as powerful, these 'border spectacles of migration control' (De Genova forthcoming) simultaneously also create the necessity for further controls. The accusations of fraud and selfishness by government officials construct the superiority of the state as an entity that acts in the general interest of all (Ferguson 2006: 92). By default, migration brokers and family members are constructed as instances that only represent particular interests and that are positioned 'below' the state. In this study, I investigate competing moves, but also overlaps between the regulatory ambitions of state, market and family. By doing so, I demonstrate how the state's monopoly over the legitimate means of mobility is continuously in the making – amongst others through accusations of fraud and selfishness.

The focus on the different meanings and implications of paper, marriage and money (as effects of respectively state, family and market controls) within trajectories of migrant departure, has made it possible to study various access paths and hurdles towards geographical mobility, as well as my informants' experiences of their (migration) trajectories. Migration choices and emigration strategies do not depend on having or not having information, but on whether information is trusted and how it is interpreted. My research has demonstrated that women's migration trajectories are not just characterised by vulnerabilities. In certain respects their strategies – for instance, in relation to courtship and marriage practices – are also enabling. While migration trajectories are clearly gendered, this thesis has demonstrated that it would be mistaken to assume that women are always more vulnerable, and that migration creates those vulnerabilities in the first place.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **A line for 1.5 million CFA: overcoming closure through migration brokers**

In the first chapter, I focus on relations between migration brokers and clients and the way in which both deal with the loss of money and the involuntary return of aspiring migrants. I seek to explain why aspiring migrants are willing to take considerable risk by paying relatively large sums of money to brokers. Seeking to go beyond an analysis of relations between aspiring migrants and brokers in terms of either mere profit or patronage (Kyle & Siracusa 2005; Kyle & Koslowski 2001; Spener 2009), this chapter shows that trust in migration brokerage needs to be considered on a micro-level with due attention to a wider structural context of departure.

Within a symbolic economy where possibilities for migration are understood as lines and as openings, migration brokers are trusted according to their level of connections and their convincing portrayal of their own powers. Given that closure (i.e. the impossibility of air travel) is the point of departure for many, even

migration brokers who fail are not necessarily considered as enemies. To aspiring migrants, they are allies and helpers in a quest for both geographic and social mobility. From the perspective of aspiring migrants, failed emigration trajectories with brokers are similar to the ones without brokers. I argue that the deeds and actions of migration brokers need to be analysed in relation to the expectations and norms of aspiring migrants and their family members.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The rise and fall of migration brokers: limits of credibility beyond the law**

In the second chapter, I discuss the development of two men who become migration brokers and the limits of their capacity and credibility. The chapter seeks to explain why migration brokers (like Mr. James and Mr. Walter) are credible in the Cameroonian context when they proclaim to fight illegal migration. I do so by investigating the place of the law with respect to the credibility of migration brokers. Using local distinctions between dokimen, feymen and big men, the chapter argues for an evaluation of the scale of the power of migration brokers that goes beyond distinctions like 'illegal' and 'legal'.

In this chapter, I argue that migration brokers are credible authorities in Cameroon because aspiring migrants evaluate migration brokerage less in relation to the location of paper production and more in terms of the efficiency of the travel documents. With respect to the travel permits that migration brokers issue and give to their clients, what matters most to aspiring migrants is not the 'legality' of papers but their capacity. An exploration of the terminology of dokimen, furthermore, points us towards the limits of the distinction between forms of paper production within the supposed realms of 'the state' and the 'market'. Aspiring migrants do not always distinguish between state and non-state mediation, and thus do not perceive of migration brokers as working against the state.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Luck, legality and technologies of mediation: What does it take to get a visa?**

The third chapter focuses on visa application processes at the American (and to a lesser extent French) consulate office in Yaoundé. Taking as its starting point conflicting narratives of luck and legality, I explore what it takes to get a visa. The case studies in the chapter demonstrate the extent to which both legality and luck are belief systems that contribute towards framing some types of mediation as legitimate - and even immediate - and other as illegitimate. By analysing decision-making processes of consulate officers, the chapter highlights the construction of state authority and its supposed boundaries with market actors as ongoing processes (Mitchell 1991).

The chapter argues that accusations against dokimen are better understood not as the condemnation of mediation, but as a struggle to establish the state's monopoly over legitimate mediation. Processes of legal interpretation and application are necessarily mediated, and the work of facilitators and intermediaries needs to

be seen within a continuum. All law is mediated, but not all mediation is legal. Through the criminalisation of certain types of mediation, state officials draw a boundary between different types of mediation and thus legitimise state claim to the monopoly for legitimate control of mobility. The framing of certain types of mediation as 'illegal' should hence not be taken for granted, but taken as a site of analysis.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

##### **Marriage@security.fr: marriage migration and the production of fraud and selfishness**

The aim of this chapter is to work out how forms of regulation of marriage migration by both state and family relate and connect with one another. The chapter is based on observations of marriage visa interviews at the French consulate office and on two case studies of Cameroonian women. Regulatory dynamics at both the French and the American consulate office are driven by fears and accusations that visa applicants might be committing fraud for their selfish personal purposes. By taking marriage migration as a theme, in the chapter I also explore multiple meanings of accusations of fraud and selfishness. Through the analysis of articulations between state and family forms of regulation, results of this chapter contribute to debates on marriage migration and human security.

The chapter has argued that the regulatory dynamics at consulate offices frame monetary exchanges, marital unions and family loyalties in a way that constructs visa applicants in general, and aspiring female spouses in particular, as supposedly 'fraudulent' and selfish. While consulate officers might seek to ridicule family authority, the family's expectations are serious and important for (aspiring) migrants. The legitimacy of marital unions, family loyalties and monetary exchanges is crucially framed by family authorities. Aspiring migrant women are thus confronted with contradictory (normative) demands and pressures by both state and family authorities. The accusations of selfishness and fraud made by *both* family and state officials constitute control mechanisms for aspiring migrant women.

#### **CHAPTER 5**

##### **Unlucky, but worldly: the moral economy of deportation**

Deportation creates vulnerabilities for migrants – which in the case of deported migrant women have direct consequences for the ways in which they can and have to engage in courtship practices, marriage intentions and childbirth plans. In this final chapter, I study how deported migrant women and their family members understand, experience and deal with deportation. I ask why neither knowledge, nor the direct experience of deportation lower people's motivation for migration. Through an in-depth case study of Manuella along with a few contrasting cases, I explain why deportation is understood in Cameroon in terms of bad luck, bad behaviour and laziness. In offering explanations to the above puzzles, I unravel

the legal consciousness that drives migration policies in countries of arrival (Silbey 2005).

Policy makers assume that higher deportation rates would discourage undocumented migration because they assume that illegality is a relatively immediate cause of deportation. This chapter argues that deportations do not so much flow out of the condition of illegality, but - inversely - feed into belief systems surrounding the notions of legality and illegality. The question as to why aspiring migrants continue to fall bush in the face of the danger of deportation stems from, and even feeds into, a belief that attributes a quasi-automatic power to law. Through a critical analysis of narratives that refer to bad luck, laziness and bad behaviour, this chapter locates illegality as a precondition and not a direct cause of forced return.



By investigating what makes young Cameroonian migrate at all cost, my study has unravelled how migration law and policy is based on normative assumptions about money, paper and marriage. By studying rather than presupposing the place of the law in conditions of departure, I suggest we will better understand why migration is connected with high costs for some and not for others. This study has demonstrated how close attention to the 'moral economy of departure' and the 'plurality of regulatory authorities' can surpass the simplistic analysis of migration in terms of legal versus illegal - as some sort of fixed opposition. With a greater awareness of the plurality of controls and the conflicting norms involved, a study of the governance of migration becomes possible that is attentive to the state as a regulatory authority, but does not take for granted its supposed moral and spatial superiority.

## Samenvatting

‘Als je 2,5 miljoen CFA zou krijgen, wat zou je met het geld doen?’<sup>4</sup> Op de radio werd verhit gediscussieerd over de hamvraag van de radiopresentator. Een veel gehoorde reactie was om het geld te gebruiken voor migratie. Toen mijn onderzoeksassistent en ik honderd respondenten ondervroegen in verschillende wijken van Buea (Zuid-West, Kameroen), gaf bijna 40 procent aan met het geld naar het buitenland te willen gaan. Er gaapt echter een brede kloof tussen droom en daad. Van de respondenten zou 80 procent graag hebben gereisd, maar slechts 5 procent was ooit daadwerkelijk in het westen geweest.

Hoewel de reis behoorlijk duur is en het steeds moeilijker wordt om aan de benodigde documenten te komen, blijven jonge Kameroenezen onverminderd hunkeren naar emigratie. Zelfs nadat een informant was gedeporteerd, bleef mijn onderzoeksassistent, Delphine, ontkennen dat er mogelijke keerzijdes of negatieve bijeffecten verbonden waren aan pogingen het land te verlaten zonder reis-papieren. Terwijl ze nijver interviews aan het uitschrijven was waarin vrouwen zonder verblijfsvergunning praatten over hun dagelijkse strijd om het hoofd in Europa boven water te houden, placht Delphine op te springen en uit te roepen: ‘Je veux go a tout prix!’<sup>5</sup> Zelfverzekerd vertelde ze me dat ze hoe dan ook en tegen iedere prijs zou gaan. Als anderen pech hadden gehad, zou zij hard werken om het wel te laten lukken. Ze moest en zou slagen en reizen was de enige manier om dat te bereiken!

In dit proefschrift probeer ik te verklaren waarom jonge Kameroenezen migratie najagen tegen iedere prijs. Het is geschreven in reactie op zowel de enorme gemo-tiveerdheid voor emigratie in Kameroen als op het mensenhandeldebat in Europa. Vrije circulatie van geld en goederen wordt vaak toegejuicht, terwijl vrije circulatie van mensen als problematisch wordt gezien (Malkki 2002: 352; Kearney 1986; Carling 2002: 5). De paradoxen tussen mobiliteit en afsluiting dienen in dit proefschrift als vertrekpunt. Met betrekking tot jonge Kameroenezen zoals Delphine heb ik ge-keken naar de attitudes tegenover de kosten die aan migratie zijn verbonden, naar informatiestromen en naar de opvattingen over succes en mislukking.

Pas sinds het eind van de jaren negentig wordt emigratie door Engelstalige Kameroenezen aangeduid met de Pidgin-term *bushfalling*. *Bushfalling* bestaat eruit de wildernis in te trekken (de bush) op jacht naar vlees (geld) om met jacht-trofeeën terug naar huis te komen. Deze zegswijze gebruik ik om de kwetsbaar-

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4 In het origineel: ‘If man for dash you 2.5 million, you for do weti with am?’

5 ‘Paris à tout prix’ is de titel van een recente Kameroenese film over de gevaren van emigratie. De film behandelt prostitutie, oplichters, mislukking en deportatie. In haar verwijzing naar deze film uit Franstalig Kameroen gebruikt Delphine een mengsel van Frans en Pidgin. De taalsituatie in Kameroen is behoorlijk ingewikkeld. Kameroen was een Duitse kolonie, die tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog werd verdeeld tussen Frankrijk en Groot-Brittannië. In 1961 werden beide helften herenigd in de Federale Republiek Kameroen, maar het land is nog altijd opgedeeld in Engelstalige en Franstalige gebieden. In het Engelstalige deel wordt voornamelijk Pidgin gesproken in plaats van Engels.

heid van migranten te bestuderen vanuit het perspectief van mensen in hun land van oorsprong.<sup>6</sup>

De houdingen ten opzichte van potentieel riskante migratietrajecten kunnen alleen worden begrepen vanuit het perspectief van migranten in spe op hun plaats van vertrek. Zo probeer ik tegenwicht te bieden aan de tendens in de literatuur om te schrijven vanuit het perspectief van de waarden en normen in het land van aankomst. In etnografische gevalsstudies belicht ik verscheidene ruimtes (de kantoren van migratiebemiddelaars, ambassades, luchthavens) en momenten (financiële transacties, het vertrek, de terugkeer) zoals die zich met betrekking tot migratie in Kameroen manifesteren. Ik bespreek de relaties tussen migratiebemiddelaars en hun cliënten; de opkomst van migratiebemiddelaars en hun betrekkingen tot overheidsinstanties; de dynamiek tijdens visumaanvragen op consulaten; verschillende manieren om veiligheid te zoeken in het geval van aan huwelijk gerelateerde migratietrajecten; en percepties en ervaringen bij deportatie. Mijn onderzoek naar de betekenis en het belang van begrippen als openingen, lijntjes, verbindingen en mazzel levert inzichten op voor academische debatten over migratie, illegaliteit en veiligheid.

Ik kwam in aanraking met de migratiethematiek tijdens (zowel praktisch als wetenschappelijk) werk met betrekking tot mensenhandel. Binnen het mensenhandelparadigma worden vrouwelijke migranten vaak gereduceerd tot slachtoffers. Inderdaad worden in films en op internet vaak onrealistische beelden geschetst van het leven in Europa, maar ik betoog dat het mensenhandelparadigma evenzeer ongegronde beelden in het leven wekt, en wel over hoe en waarom jonge vrouwen in westelijk Afrika emigratie nastreven. De nadruk op misbruik en uitbuiting in het land van aankomst overschaduwde vaak de keuzes, motieven en problemen van migranten in spe voorafgaand aan hun vertrek. In dit boek beoog ik een alternatieve zienswijze te ontwikkelen die meer aandacht schenkt aan de keuzes en worstelingen van migranten in spe als zij nog in hun land van vertrek verblijven.

In navolging van De Genova (2002) en Torpey (1998) ben ik van mening dat juridische onderscheiden tussen 'mensenhandel' en 'mensensmokkel' of tussen 'formele' en 'informele' migratie niet klakkeloos mogen worden geaccepteerd en dat begrippen als 'legaliteit' en 'illegaliteit' dienen te worden geproblematiseerd. Daarom moet de historische en politieke constructie van deze termen worden onderzocht alvorens te analyseren hoe ze worden gebruikt om een etiket te plakken op mensen, activiteiten of trajecten. Door deze aanpak zijn de resultaten van mijn onderzoek relevant voor kwesties binnen het mensenhandeldebat zonder gestuurd te worden door de parameters van juridische en administratieve definities (Malkki 1995: 505).

De governance van migratie is het centrale onderwerp van mijn werk. In etnografische gevalsstudies bekijk ik hoe migratie wordt gereguleerd door migratiebemiddelaars, overheidsfunctionarissen en familieleden. Ik gebruik het begrip 'meervoudige regulatieve autoriteiten' (Roitman 2005) om vraagtekens te zetten

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6 Ik geef gehoor aan Wongs oproep om trafficking trajecten te analyseren op basis van de omstandigheden waaronder pogingen tot migratie worden ondernomen (2005:87).

bij het beperkte idee – meer of minder impliciet aanwezig in veel onderzoek naar migratie – dat de staat in dezen de voornaamste of enige autoriteit zou zijn. Door de markt, de staat en de familie te betrekken, gaat mijn theoretische benadering verder dan structuralistische analyses die migratie bezien in het kader van wereldwijde systemen en zich concentreren op economische ongelijkheden (Sassen 1988; Massey et al 1993: 444). Ze gaat ook verder dan netwerkbenaderingen die migratie vooral behandelen aan de hand van familiebanden, verwantschap en sociaal kapitaal (Levitt 2007; Glick Schiller 1992; Nyberg Sorensen & Fog Olwig 2001).

Wie verder kijkt dan het ogenschijnlijke monopolie van de staat op de legitieme controle op mobiliteit, bemerkt hoe de staat medeplichtig is aan de productie van fraude. De staat gebruikt grenscontroles deels om machtig over te komen, maar deze 'spektakelstukken van migratiecontrole aan de grens' (De Genova nog te verschijnen) creëren op hun beurt de noodzaak tot verdere controles. Doordat overheidsfunctionarissen anderen van fraude en egoïsme beschuldigen, construeren zij de superioriteit van de staat als entiteit die handelt in het algemeen belang (Ferguson 2006: 92). De implicatie is dat migratiebemiddelaars en familieleden slechts particuliere belangen zouden vertegenwoordigen en 'onder' de staat zouden staan. In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik hoe de regulatieve ambities van de staat, de markt en de familie elkaar beconcurreren en soms juist met elkaar overlappen. Op deze manier laat ik zien hoe het monopolie van de staat op legitieme vormen van mobiliteit voortdurend opnieuw wordt geconstrueerd, onder meer door andere actoren te beschuldigen van fraude en egoïsme.

De aandacht voor de diverse betekenissen en implicaties van papieren, huwelijk en geld (de controledomeinen van respectievelijk de staat, de familie en de markt) binnen emigratietrajecten heeft het mogelijk gemaakt onderzoek te doen naar zowel de verscheidene toegangswegen naar en obstakels bij geografische mobiliteit, als de manier waarop mijn informanten hun migratietraject ervaren. Keuzes en strategieën bij emigratie zijn niet afhankelijk van het al dan niet beschikken over informatie, maar van de mate waarin informatie wordt vertrouwd en de manier waarop ze wordt geïnterpreteerd. Mijn onderzoek laat zien dat migratietrajecten van vrouwen niet uitsluitend door kwetsbaarheden worden gekenmerkt. Hun strategieën, bijvoorbeeld met betrekking tot verlovings- en huwelijksverbeteren hun situatie ook in sommige opzichten. Het is duidelijk dat de aard van migratietrajecten deels door gender bepaald wordt, maar uit mijn onderzoek blijkt dat het een misverstand zou zijn om aan te nemen dat vrouwen altijd kwetsbaarder zouden zijn dan mannen en dat hun kwetsbaarheden door migratie in het leven zouden worden geroepen.

## HOOFDSTUK 1

### Een lijntje voor 1,5 miljoen cfa: afsluiting doorbreken met migratiebemiddelaars

In het eerste hoofdstuk concentreer ik mij op de relaties tussen migratiebemiddelaars en hun cliënten en op de manier waarop beiden omspringen met het verlies van geld en met onvrijwillige terugkeer. Ik probeer te verklaren waarom migranten in spe bereid zijn zware risico's te nemen door relatief grote bedragen te beta-

len aan migratiebemiddelaars. Door de relaties tussen migratiebemiddelaars en hun cliënten niet slechts te bezien in termen van winstbejag of patronage (Kyle & Siracusa 2005; Kyle & Koslowski 2001; Spener 2009) toont dit hoofdstuk dat het vertrouwen in migratiebemiddeling moet worden bekeken op microniveau, met gepaste aandacht voor de bredere structurele context in het land van vertrek.

Binnen een symbolische economie waarin migratiemogelijkheden worden bezien als 'lijntjes' en als 'openingen', is het vertrouwen dat migratiebemiddelaars weten te wekken afhankelijk van het niveau van hun contacten en van de overtuigingskracht waarmee ze hun eigen macht schetsen. Aangezien afsluiting (de onmogelijkheid om met het vliegtuig te reizen) voor velen het uitgangspunt is, worden zelfs migratiebemiddelaars die falen niet noodzakelijkerwijs als vijanden gezien. Voor migranten in spe zijn het bondgenoten en helpers in een zoektocht naar geografische en sociale mobiliteit. Vanuit het perspectief van migranten in spe zijn mislukte migratietrajecten met bemiddelaars vergelijkbaar met mislukte migratietrajecten zonder bemiddelaars. Ik betoog dat de handelingen van migratiebemiddelaars dienen te worden geanalyseerd in relatie tot de normen en verwachtingen van migranten in spe en hun familieleden.

## HOOFDSTUK 2

### **Opkomst en ondergang van migratiebemiddelaars: grenzen aan de geloofwaardigheid buiten de wet**

In het tweede hoofdstuk bespreek ik de ontwikkeling van twee mannen tot migratiebemiddelaar en de grenzen aan hun capaciteiten en geloofwaardigheid. Het hoofdstuk probeert inzichtelijk te maken waarom migratiebemiddelaars zoals meneer James en meneer Walter geloofwaardig zijn binnen de Kameroense context wanneer ze beweren tegen illegale migratie te vechten. Dit doe ik door te onderzoeken welke plaats de wet inneemt met betrekking tot de geloofwaardigheid van migratiebemiddelaars. Aan de hand van het onderscheid dat in Kameroen wordt gemaakt tussen dokimen, feymen en big men pleit ik ervoor om de macht van migratiebemiddelaars te evalueren op een manier die verder gaat dan het onderscheid tussen 'illegaal' en 'legaal'.

Migratiebemiddelaars zijn geloofwaardige autoriteiten in Kameroen, omdat migranten in spe hun oordeel niet zozeer baseren op de plaats waar documenten worden geproduceerd als wel op hun efficiëntie. Bij de reisvergunningen die migratiebemiddelaars aan hun cliënten verstrekken, gaat het de migranten in spe er niet om of ze legaal zijn maar of ze er in de praktijk mee kunnen reizen. De terminologie die wordt gebruikt voor dokimen wijst er bovendien op dat het niet altijd zin heeft om onderscheid te maken tussen documentproductie in het domein van 'de staat' en in dat van 'de markt'. Migrant in spe onderscheiden niet altijd of bemiddeling door de staat geschiedt of niet, waardoor zij migratiebemiddelaars niet beschouwen als mensen die de staat tegenwerken.



### HOOFDSTUK 3

#### **Mazzel, legaliteit en bemiddelingstechnologieën: wat is nodig om een visum te krijgen?**

In het derde hoofdstuk richt ik mij op visumaanvraagprocessen bij het Amerikaanse (en in mindere mate het Franse) consulaat in Yaoundé. Door tegenstrijdige verhalen over mazzel en legaliteit als vertrekpunt te nemen, onderzoek ik wat er nodig is om een visum te krijgen. De gevalsstudies in het hoofdstuk illustreren de mate waarin zowel legaliteit als mazzel geloofssystemen zijn die sommige vormen van bemiddeling als legitiem (en zelfs onbemiddeld) doen voorkomen en andere als niet legitiem. Door besluitvormingsprocessen van consulaatmedewerkers te analyseren, belicht het hoofdstuk hoe gezag van de staat en de veronderstelde afbakening tussen staat en markt voortdurend in geconstructueerd worden (Mitchell 1991).

Ik betoog dat beschuldigingen jegens dokimen niet zozeer dienen te worden beschouwd als veroordeling van bemiddeling, maar veeleer als een poging van de staat om het monopolie op legitieme bemiddeling te verwerven. Het interpreteren en toepassen van de wet is ondenkbaar zonder bemiddeling en de werkzaamheden van tussenpersonen moeten worden gezien binnen een continuüm. Iedere wet behoeft bemiddeling, maar niet iedere bemiddeling is wettelijk. Door bepaalde vormen van bemiddeling te criminaliseren trekken overheidsfunctionarissen een grens tussen verschillende vormen van bemiddeling. Zo legitimeren ze het monopolie dat de staat voor zichzelf opeist op de legitieme controle op mobiliteit. Het categoriseren van bepaalde bemiddelingsvormen als 'illegaal' dient daarom niet klakkeloos te worden aanvaard, maar te worden gezien als object van analyse.

### HOOFDSTUK 4:

#### ***Marriage@security.fr*: huwelijksmigratie en de productie van fraude en egoïsme**

Het doel van dit hoofdstuk is om uit te werken hoe de manieren waarop de staat en de familie huwelijksmigratie reguleren zich tot elkaar verhouden en met elkaar in contact staan. Het hoofdstuk is gebaseerd op observaties bij visumaanvragen in het Franse consulaat en op twee gevalsstudies van Kameroenese vrouwen. Zowel in het Franse als in het Amerikaanse consulaat wordt de regulatieve dynamiek bepaald door angsten en beschuldigingen dat de visumaanvragers zich uit egoïstisch eigenbelang zouden bezondigen aan fraude. Aan de hand van huwelijksmigratie onderzoek ik diverse betekenissen die beschuldigingen van fraude en egoïsme kunnen hebben. De analyse van de manier waarop reguleringsmechanismen van de staat en de familie op elkaar ingrijpen levert belangrijke inzichten op voor het debat over huwelijksmigratie en menselijke veiligheid.

Als gevolg van impliciete normen over financiële transacties, huwelijken en familieloyaliteiten construeert de regulatieve dynamiek in consulaten visumaanvragers in het algemeen, en vrouwen die in het huwelijk willen treden in het bijzonder, als frauduleus en egoïstisch. Terwijl consulaatmedewerkers het gezag van de familie nog wel eens belachelijk willen maken, zijn de verwachtingen van de familie voor migranten in spe van groot gewicht. Het oordeel van de familie is van doorslaggevend belang voor de legitimiteit van huwelijken, familieloyaliteiten en

financiële transacties. Vrouwen die willen emigreren zien zich geconfronteerd met tegenstrijdige normatieve eisen. Zowel de staat als de familie zet hen onder druk. Beschuldigingen van egoïsme en fraude door zowel staat als familie vormen controlemechanismen voor vrouwelijke migranten in spe.

## **HOOFDSTUK 5:**

### **Onfortuinlijk maar wereldlijk: de morele economie van de deportatie**

Deportatie maakt migranten kwetsbaar, wat in het geval van gedeporteerde vrouwen onmiddellijke gevolgen heeft voor de manier waarop ze zich kunnen en moeten opstellen bij hofmakerij, huwelijk en kinderplannen. In dit afsluitende hoofdstuk bestudeer ik hoe gedeporteerde vrouwen en hun familieleden de deportatie opvatten en ervaren en hoe ze ermee omgaan. Ik stel de vraag waarom de motivatie voor migratie niet te lijden heeft onder kennis van of directe ervaring met deportatie. Aan de hand van een grondige gevalsstudie over Manuella (en enkele contrasterende gevallen) leg ik uit waarom deportatie in Kameroen wordt opgevat in termen van pech, slecht gedrag en luiheid. Door bovenstaande raadsels te verklaren, leg ik het juridische bewustzijn bloot waardoor het migratiebeleid in landen van aankomst wordt gestuurd (Silbey 2005).

Beleidsmakers gaan ervanuit dat hogere deportatiecijfers migratie zonder geldige documenten zouden ontmoedigen, omdat zij aannemen dat illegaliteit een relatief onmiddellijke oorzaak van deportatie is. In dit hoofdstuk betoog ik dat deportaties niet zozeer voortvloeien uit de toestand van illegaliteit als wel het concept van illegaliteit als zodanig construeren. De vraag waarom migranten in spe vasthouden aan bushfaling ondanks het risico op deportatie, komt voort uit (en bekrachtigt) een geloof dat de wet een semi-automatische macht toeschrijft. Aan de hand van een kritische analyse van verhalen over pech, luiheid en slecht gedrag wordt illegaliteit in dit hoofdstuk als een voorwaarde voor gedwongen terugkeer geïdentificeerd, niet als een onmiddellijke oorzaak.



Door te onderzoeken wat jonge Kameroenezen ertoe brengt tegen iedere prijs te emigreren, heeft mijn proefschrift blootgelegd hoe de wetten en het beleid met betrekking tot migratie gebaseerd zijn op normatieve aannames over geld, documenten en huwelijk. Wanneer we de plaats van de wet in het land van vertrek niet vooronderstellen maar kritisch onderzoeken, zullen we mijns inziens beter begrijpen waarom er voor sommigen hoge kosten aan migratie verbonden zijn en voor anderen niet. Door aandacht te besteden aan 'de morele economie van het vertrek' en 'de meervoudigheid van de regulatieve autoriteiten' ga ik in dit proefschrift verder dan een simplistische analyse van migratie in termen van legaal versus illegaal,

als ware dat een onwrikbaar onderscheid. Een groter besef van het veelvoud aan controlemechanismen en tegenstrijdige normen maakt het mogelijk de governance van migratie te onderzoeken op een manier die aandacht heeft voor de staat als regulerende autoriteit zonder de veronderstelde morele en ruimtelijke superioriteit van die staat klakkeloos te aanvaarden.